

That One Month by **Raven7808**

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Summary: This story picks up right after El closes the gate and will end right before the snowball. It's got Thanksgiving at Mama's, Game night, and lots of Mileven. Plus, what's happening to El when she explores her powers a little too far. T for language, suggestive humor, and lots of fluff. This story is going to set the foundation of my future stories.

1. Chapter 1

That One Month

Summary: This story picks up right after El closes the gate and will end right before the snowball. It will probably be 2-3 chapters (4 if I get a bit carried away). T for swearing. This story is going to set the foundation of my future stories that will be building off of this one. Let me know what you think. It's been a long time since I've written anything so I hope you like it.

Chapter 1:

Once the ambulance left Hawkins Lab with the injured Dr. Owens, Hopper loaded El into his truck, but wasn't sure where to go. He knew El needed a safe place to rest, but the safe house was probably still a mess from their fight, not to mention whatever Joyce had done to it after getting that "thing" out of Will. So he took her to the Byers House. There El would at least be around her friends before she had to go back into hiding.

God, was that going to be a hell of a conversation. He knew there would be different rules this time, for instance he probably wasn't going to be able to get away with El having zero contact with her friends, especially Mike. Hopper still felt guilty about that. He had known the kid was missing her, but counting the days? Just how did they were become so attached. I mean the kid was... 13? Jesus, a lovesick 13 years old. Hopper was trying not to panic thinking about that. Especially when he had a lot of negotiating left to do with what was left of the "people" at Hawkins Lab. He wanted to play his cards right and get her the normal life she deserved. Now he just had to convince her and her entourage to let him. Not to mention, Hopper was still trying to come to terms with having seen the extent of her powers. Had she really levitated off the ground?

Hopper always thought of himself as a level headed guy amidst all the crazy shit that's been happening, but to see it go down first hand, had shaken him. I mean she hadn't just pushed that mind-thing, she'd turned it to dust. Not that he was scared of her. No, he was just more aware now of what was at stake if he fails to protect her. He knew

she was a good kid, a bit of a brat, but who wasn't a brat at that age. He also needed to control his temper. El is not Sarah and that black hole was just his own insecurities. Learning to separate the two in the future was going to be key in giving Eleven a normal life. A life where she gets to go to school, buy clothes that actually fit, and play outside with her friends. Speaking of friends...

As he pulled into the Byer's driveway, a lanky figure came running out of the house.

"El!" shouted Mike, trying to open the car door before Hopper could fully stop the truck. Mike knew that El closing the gate had been essential in defeating the Mind Flayer, but he hoped to God they were done with this shit. No more goodbyes and no more broken promises. He had to make sure she hadn't left him again, that she'd kept her promise. He also had been nervous that Hopper was planning to hide her again. Mike was not going to let that happen again. 353 days of hoping she would answer and not knowing if she was okay or if he had just imagined her outside his window. He had thought he was losing his mind. He couldn't do that again.

El had been dozing off when she heard Mike's voice. Immediately, she was up and reaching for the door. Hopper rolled his eyes at her ridiculous attempt to get the door open while clearly still in a sleepy haze. It wasn't so much that Hopper minded El being so close to someone, it was more that that someone was male and had almost kissed her. In front of everyone. In Hopper's time, you made out under the bleachers or in an empty stairway. Always away from eyes, but especially parental eyes. At least that's what Hopper told himself was bothering him, and not the fact that calling these two "close" was an understatement. Which they were too young to be so intense with each other.

"Hey Kid, she's pretty wiped out. Give her some space to... Hey, easy!" Mike pulled Eleven from the truck while Eleven tried to hug him and promptly fell on him. Her legs weren't able to hold her, but she didn't seem to care. Mike was here. She could touch him. No more disappearing-not-able-to-hear-her-speak Mike. She was completely content to half sit on him and the ground forever.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt? We saw the lights go super bright and I

knew that it was from you. We were so worried. I... I was so worried." Mike whispered that last part. Hopper, who was gradually becoming upset by the fact that neither El nor Mike had made a move to separate. Even though he was clearly standing right there, like 5 feet away from them. Apparently, there will be lots of talks about this is not okay. And they needed to happen soon. Like right now...

"El!" The rest of the kids had spilled out of the house and the incessant chatter started. The phrase one at a time was still lost on the young. "What happened to her face?" "Are you alright?" "Did you close the gate?" "We knew you could do it!" "I bet you're tired, you want something to eat?" By this point, El's head had slumped onto Mike's shoulder and it looked like she planned to sleep there.

Hopper was starting to regret not taking her straight to the safe house.

"Guys, she needs to get some rest. Can you make room please?" Hopper came around the truck to pick her up off the ground. But El wouldn't let go of Mike's hand so it an awkward shuffle into the house.

"Mrs. Byers' room is clean and El could rest in there. Also it's got a bathroom so we can clean off the blood." Mike said while reaching his other hand toward her face where blood had caked under her nose.

Geez, kid! I get it, you were worried now stop with all the touching. Hopper was finally successful in maneuvering El away from Mike when he placed her on the bed. Mike wandered away for a moment and Hopper thought he was finally going to get El settled without being bothered.

"Mike?" whispered an anxious El, searching for Mike. *Oh come on!* Mike immediately appeared grabbing her hand and kneeling beside the bed. He wasted no time in cleaning her face with a washcloth. Eleven was looking at Mike in a way that was making Hopper feel like he was intruding on something private. *To hell with that, she's too young for this sort of thing.* The rest of the kids didn't think much of this as they filed into the room still chattering.

"Alright, let's let her rest first. She's not going anywhere and we could all do with some winding down. So let's you and I move to the living room where everyone else is and recap what went on tonight." The kids shuffled out of the room and starting the story of how they distracted the Demo-dogs, except for Mike who finished cleaning El's face.

"Mike stays." El said while giving Hopper her 'not up for discussion' look. *I invented that look, sweetheart.*

"No, Mike goes" Hopper said firmly and crossed his arms. Both El and Mike gave him the same stubborn look. *So that's where she learned that look.* Yet another thing to hold against this adolescence. Hopper narrowed his eyes at them. He was not a stranger to dealing with stubbornness. It was only when El's eyelids started to droop, Mike immediately tried a different tactic.

"5 minutes then? You let me think she was dead for a whole year, I think you can give us 5 minutes." Mike asked while looking like he wouldn't mind having another go at Hopper. For a skinny kid, he could deliver a good hit.

Still, the kid had an attitude problem. Hopper signed, *I must be getting soft in my old age.* The guilt combined with the fact that he knew Mike was actually a good kid and did care a lot for El, made Hopper reconsider.

"Fine! 5 minutes and then if you're not out I'm coming in. And you don't want me to come in. Got it." Both kids nodded.

"Halfway happy" whispered El with a smile. Hopper knew he was done for with this one. She had him wrapped around her finger.

Hopper reached over to pat Eleven on the head before leaving the room. "Good job today, Kid. I'm proud of you." El smiled at him. She was finally starting to understand what "home" was. Home was Mike. It was Hopper. It was her friends. And she would protect them all to the end.

Hopper made his way out of the room and just as he closed the door he noticed Joyce in the hallway with a smirk on her face.

"What?" said Hopper.

"They're good kids. I would even go as far to say they aren't kids anymore with all this stuff happening." she said with a mournful expression. "But you know this and you also know you can trust Mike with El. Why the hesitation?"

"They're just so young. I want them to hold on to their childhood while they can, at least what's left of it. This past year with her has given me a newfound respect for parents. I don't know how you all don't go insane." Hopper was rubbing his head. Joyce chuckled at that.

"You can't protect them from everything, no matter how hard you try Hop. God knows I've tried to shelter Will after what happened last year and look where that got me. You can't control everything and trying to only seems to make it worse. They need to figure things out on their own. You, as a parent, just.. need to be there." Joyce reached out to rub Hopper's back. She didn't mention it, but the poor man had his work cut out for him with Eleven. It was going to be lots of fun to watch.

"How is Will?" realizing that was probably the first thing he should have asked her. Joyce smiled a tired smile and looked over to Will's room.

"He's sleeping with Jonathan. Getting that.. thing out of him was more of a struggle than we thought," Joyce rubbed her neck. That was when Hopper noticed the bruises. "But he's a trooper. Everyone else is in the living room. We should probably go and join them." Joyce whispered that last sentence and looked awkwardly at the ground then back to Hopper, who had taken a step closer.

"Joyce, what happened to your neck? It looks like you were.."

"Don't worry about it. Really Hop, it's fine." Hopper could tell she didn't want to talk about this now so he let it drop. For now.

"You gonna be okay? If you need anything, you just have to ask. You know that right?" Hopper was running his hands up and down her arms to comfort her. Joyce wasn't sure if now was a good time to be

vulnerable, but Hopper was so warm and understanding... and tall. She gave in and rested her head lightly on his arm.

"I think so. I use to believe as long as my family was safe, I could survive anything. But losing Bob.." Joyce voice broke as a sob found its way out. Hopper pulled her into a hug and knew that they were all going need some healing when it came to losing Bob. Not that he and Hopper were close, but none of them would have survived tonight without him. Being a cop, you sometimes saw things that could make you question life and why horrible things happened to good people. Losing Bob.. Hopper knew he would always wonder if he could have done something different which would have ended with Bob alive. That sort of thinking wasn't going to help anyone, but knowing this didn't stop the thoughts from coming. They heard a throat clear behind them.

"Hey.. Uh, you guys want something to eat? Um.. Also... Um, Mrs. Byers, we had to empty out your fridge to make room for the Demodog. But don't be mad because we can prepare you a lovely meal to say thank you and to prevent your food from being wasted" said Dustin, who was slowly coming to realize he might not have brought up the topic well or at the most appropriate time.

"Wait, what's in my fridge?" Joyce immediately released Hopper and turning around to head towards the kitchen as well as a quickly retreating Dustin.

"Okay, so don't be mad. See.. we have a new species on our hands.. an.. and in the name of science..."

"Dustin! Please tell me you're joking."

"Pssh! Well of course I'm totally joking.. Haha.. It was all Steve's idea!"

"What!"

"That's better." Mike said as he wiped the last of Eleven's blood from her ears. This reminded him of last year when she had saved his life.

"Still pretty?" said Eleven with a knowing smile on her face.

Mike was shocked at first and then smiled as he remembered how well she understood him and how right it was to just be around her. He was so happy to have her back that it still didn't feel real. *Do not pinch yourself to see if you're awake. No being lame in front of El! Focus Wheeler! What did she say..Oh ya...*

"Ya, pretty.. really pretty." Mike said and reaching to touch her hair. "Your hair is really pretty." It had grown. She had grown. Eleven's punk look was pretty badass and looked good on her. Her eyeshadow was still on and bit smudged and it made her seem a lot older. Mike wasn't sure how he felt about it. He knew that they had both changed and worried if things could never go back to how they once were.

"El? I'm glad you're safe. I was really worried. I know you need to rest, but I wanted to tell you that I'll always be here for you. You know that, right?" Mike knew he was probably being a bit dramatic, but he couldn't seem to help himself. He had lost her once and thinking about losing her again made him feel a little crazy. Also the fact that she *had* heard him all along and said nothing.. well maybe she didn't trust him. Mike recognized deep down that it was a stupid thing to think, but it didn't hurt to make sure.

Eleven was surprised to hear the vulnerability in Mike's voice. It was also sweet. Her sweet Mike. She smiled softly and touched his hair and then moved her fingers to trace his freckles. She loved his freckles. After running her fingers from one side to the other, she carefully cupped his cheek with her hand. She just held him there for a while, staring into his big brown eyes. Eyes she'd missed so much. Her gaze traveled his face, his nose his mouth and then back to his eyes. She was finally with Mike, no longer watching him in the void. She could touch him and when she looked at him, he looked back. Really looked at her. Eleven could feel herself getting lost in them which made it harder to stay awake.

"Mike.." Eleven whispered "I understand." She gave him that look. It was their way of communication. With Mike, she didn't need to use words all the time. Mike grinned. *I guess there are some things that never change.* Mike had a feeling that his 5 minutes were either up or coming up soon, but getting in trouble was worth staying with Eleven just a little longer.

"You should rest. I'll be here when you wake and then we can catch up on the year that we've missed." Mike assured her while squeezing her hand. He could feel her grip starting to loosen.

"Yes" Eleven said as her eyes slowly closed. Mike rested his head next to hers just in case she wasn't sleeping. Yeah, he just wanted to make sure. She looked so peaceful. He was just wanted to make sure she didn't have any bad dreams so he would stay, just for a little bit. He yawned and closed his eyes.

That was how Hopper found them. Eleven and Mike asleep with Eleven on the bed and Mike sitting on the floor with his head on the bed, hands clasped and noses almost touching.

Hopper wasn't sure what to do in these sort of situations so he called for backup. When Joyce appeared and saw the two inappropriately arranged kids, she just laughed and dragged a very unwilling Hopper behind her and out of the room.

Authors Note: Sorry it was so short. It also turned out to be a bit slow paced. I had a clear vision on how I wanted this to play out, but putting it on "paper" was harder than I thought. I've written a couple stories before, but I've changed a lot since and apparently so has my writing. I should have another chapter up within a couple of days so stay with me. This story is going to be picking up I promise. And of course, let me know what you think.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2:

El was running. Her sneakers were pounding the water beneath her in the void. Sweat trickled down her neck while a shiver ran up her spine. She could feel it. It was getting closer. It was that mind thing she closed the gate on. *He* was watching her. She had felt *Him* when she looked in on her friends last night. A part of it had been inside of Will. But this time it was different. *He* was looking straight at her. *He* wanted her. *He* drew closer. El ran harder.

Mike! El wasn't sure how to get out of the void, she'd never had control over it. But everytime she had tried to touch Mike she would wake up. It couldn't hurt to try that same strategy.

Ahead she saw a bed with a boy sleeping next to it. When El got close enough she threw herself at the image. Trying for the thousandth time to grab Mike and watching him disappear into smoke. She felt a wisp of the darkness brush her shoulder as she was falling to the ground. El woke up.

Gasping, she opened her eyes and saw Mike sleeping. His hand still holding her now sweaty one. El tried to get her breathing under control so she didn't wake him up, but he must have sensed something was wrong because he opened his eyes and looked at her with concern.

"Are you alright? El, you look like you've seen a ghost. What's wrong?" Mike sat up and touched her cheek where a sweat drop had collected. He pulled his sleeve over his hand and started to wipe her face. He was thinking about making this his new hobby. Wipe El's face as much as possible for as long as possible. Then die happy. God, he was so lame.

"I'm alright. Bad dream." El had dreams in the void all the time, but it had been awhile since one made her feel so anxious. It was nice having Mike close, he helped ease her worries quicker. "Sorry I woke you. Did you sleep well?" El wasn't sure what to say. Waking up next to Mike made her very happy. His hair was sticking up on one side

and he had a drool mark on his cheek. It made the butterflies dance in her stomach. It was a special moment. A quiet and secret moment just between the two of them.

"I'm fine. Do you want to talk about your dream?" Mike also had no clue what to do. He didn't want to make her uncomfortable. El shook her head. She wanted to just forget it for now. She knew she wasn't going to get a lot of alone time with Mike and she didn't want to waste it talking about a dream. Speaking of..

"What time is it?"

Mike chuckled, "I'm not sure, but I think my 5 minutes were up a while ago." Mike got up to go check the clock.

"It's six fifteen in the morning. I wonder if there is anyone else up this early." Mike paused at the door and debated whether or not to check. He wanted to have El to himself, but also wanted to make sure everyone was okay. As quietly as he could manage, Mike opened the door and stuck his head out. No one in the hallway, but he could see someone sleeping on the couch. There were signs of life and that was good enough for Mike. Just as he turned to head back into the room he felt a shoulder brush his chest as El also leaned out into the hallway. She paused and gave Mike an innocent look.

"Eggos?" Mike chuckled and walked out of the room with her. His cheeks were starting to hurt from all the smiling. Guess it had been awhile since he'd had a reason to smile so much. Well he couldn't contain his happiness over having El back. If it meant facing Hopper so she could get her eggos, he would do it in a heartbeat. Now to find some eggos..

Hopper heard movement down the hallway and immediately woke up and grabbed his gun. When he saw El and Mike, he relaxed and was about to put his gun away. Wait what time was it? He checked his watch. Damn. He had fallen asleep which meant those two had been in the room together. Alone. All night. So much for 5 minutes. Hopper started to get up and realized that there was a head on his leg. Joyce had fallen asleep as well. The other kids were sleeping too. They were sprawled on the floor with blankets and pillows in various positions.

Hopper had made calls to all the families last night, saying that everyone was fine, that there had been an "incident" regarding Will Byers and that Dustin, Lucas, and Max had stayed to help Will through the "incident." All the families expect for Max's were okay with the kids sleeping over. But when he explained that their son Billy was also here and that he would make sure that Max was looked after, her parents finally agreed. Of course, the unconscious youth was still lying in the kitchen where they had left him and after seeing what he'd done to Steve's face, Hopper was more than happy to leave him there.

By the time the calls were made, almost everyone had fallen asleep. The day had been a long day for everybody so Hopper let them sleep. They could recap tomorrow. Thank god it was a Sunday so he didn't have to worry about the kids missing school. God, was it only Sunday? Halloween was on Wednesday, Thursday was the fight with El, Friday he had been stuck in those tunnels, Saturday was yesterday when all hell broke loose, and then today is Sunday. Wow. All of that in four days.

Mike and El entered the living room and saw Hopper watching them. His gun still in his hand. Observing the Wheeler kid go white, made the cockles of Hopper's little heart warm. A healthy dose of fear was important for the boy who clearly wanted to date his daughter.

"So I trust you both slept well. Also, no. No, you will never be left alone in a room ever again. Yes, I know you were just sleeping. That is besides the point. Yes, we said 5 minutes and yes, obviously I let that slide, but don't ever, for one second, think that what just happened is okay or could possibly happen again in the future because if it does.. So help me God.."

"Are you kids hungry?" Joyce, who had been woken up by Hopper's rant knew it was best to cut him off before he said something he might regret. She knew this parenting-a-teenager business was only going to get harder for him, had she let him continue. Besides, the poor boy looked like his face couldn't decide whether to go red with embarrassment of white out of fear. Mike looked back at Hoppers gun. *He wouldn't really shoot me .. would he?*

"Eggos?" El asked. She wasn't entirely sure what was going on

between Hopper and Mike, but she could tell Joyce was trying to stop it. Also, El was starving.

"I think we may actually have Eggos. A lot of my refrigerator foods got thrown out and funny enough the culprit who did it is now trying to pretend he's asleep and not listening to our predicament.. Oh, good morning Dustin." The kid in question immediately sat up. His curly ringlets were stuck to his face or trying to stick themselves to the ceiling.

"I would love to get started on making those Eggos for everyone, Mrs. Byer's. Also, again, so sorry about last night. I promise to dedicate my life the indentured servitude of whatever milady might need from here on .."

"Eggos for breakfast is enough Dustin." Joyce was having a hard time keeping a straight face. Who could stay angry at that goofball? Everyone was gradually started waking up by this point.

Will and Jonathan had ventured out of the room. Will looked like he could still use a few more hours of sleep, but he needed to see his friends and apologize.

Will spotted El first. Mike was showing her how to scramble eggs and trying to convince her to try some. Will didn't know what to do. He really wanted her to like him especially since everyone else told him about all the amazing things she did last year. But Will was... well he had mustered the courage to talk to his friends but not to El.. he hadn't plan for this.. regroup! ... he had to regroup...Will turned around to go back to the room to figure out his strategy to talk to El, when he felt two arms circle him from behind.

"Will, where are you going?" El had let him go and could sense his unease. She thought of Will the same as Lucas and Dustin. He was her friend. What El hadn't realized is that even though she may know him, he never got to meet her.

"I was.. I mean.. Hi.. I guess you.. okay I promise I can talk.." Will was smiling and El smiled back and neither knows who started laughing first, but they were both chuckling by the time Mike came over and introduced Eleven to Will. Will gave her a hug. Looks like

he had been worried for nothing.

"Well I guess she's not cold to all strangers.. just me.." Max muttered under her breath. Lucas and Dustin looked at her.

"Technically, Will is not a stranger to El. She's actually the one who found him in the upside-down last year." said Dustin.

"Ya and i bet she's never even seen another girl her own age so that's why..."

"I've seen you before." said El. Walking over to them. Mike and Will followed her, not sure what was going on. El's face wasn't exactly friendly, but wasn't as cold as before.

"Really? I don't remember meeting you.." Max was pretty sure she would remember meeting El, the girl was very intimidating. In a cool way, but also in a scary/pretty way.

"El, when did you see Max?" asked Mike. Everyone was very confused and El looked sheepishly at the floor.

"At school. I left the safehouse and went to find you at school.." El took a deep breath and looked at Max. "I'm sorry for making you fall. I was upset, but I know I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry." El's emotions were everywhere. This girl didn't fit into her categories of people. She wasn't an enemy, she wasn't a friend, and she wasn't a stranger. El would try for the sake of her friends to make her a not-friend friend.

"Wait, what?" it took Max awhile before remembering the magnetic pull on her board. But why would she.. wait.. oh.. Max looked at Mike while everyone was focused on El.

"You were at our school? When?" Dustin asked

"Why would you make Max fall off her board?" Lucas said.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Mike said softly. He remembered when Max fell off her board. He had a hard time believing that when he ran out looking for El that day, he must've just missed her by seconds. Timing is a bitch.

"I.. I don't..I'm sorry." El was struggling to find the words to explain why she did it. How could she tell them that she didn't like Mike smiling at other girls. Even to El, that sounded bad.

Max could see the questions were making the girl uncomfortable so she acted fast.

"Hey, don't even worry about it. It's totally cool." The guys looked at Max in surprise. *Boys..* . She rolled her eyes at them.

"It's totally okay. I get it. I'm a girl so I can understand a little. Honestly, if I had been you I probably would have pushed me off my skateboard too." Max chuckled and gave El her best smile. "Friends?" She extended her hand for the second time really hoping El would take it.

El's face started to soften and a small smile formed.

"Friends." El nodded and looked at Max's hand. She cocked her head to the side. She wasn't sure why this girl kept putting her hand out. Then it hit her. The nice man who fed her when she escaped. Benny.. Benny Hammond.. El's whole face fell and she took a deep breath pushing back the bad memories. She was an expert at pushing back the bad memories. El took a deep shaky breath and lifted her hand to awkwardly grab Max's hand and moved it up and down like Benny had shown her. Max wasn't sure what to do. It was obvious El was sad about something, but she was shaking Max's hand... well she was trying to at least. This was .. good...

"El, you okay?" Mike asked. They had all noticed her haunted look. El nodded and turned back to her eggs. The kids all looked at each other, clearly not knowing what to do. Then Hopper stood up.

"Now that everyone is up, I'd like to discuss last night and the new rules going forward. Last time shit hit the fan like this, the Hawkins lab made us sign confidentiality papers, but I'm sure we can all agree that if you say anything to anyone I will hear about it and then you will have to deal with me." Putting the fear of God into little kids had been easier when those kids weren't exposed to monsters. They all just looked at him with, 'are you serious right now?' look.

"I wanna talk about what's going to happen to El." Mike said. *Well of course you do Sparky...*

Hopper sighed. "She obviously has to be kept safe and we don't know who's out there looking for her. Just because those people in the lab might be gone doesn't mean that the agency they come from won't still try to get El. So for the foreseeable future.. she's going to go back into hiding.. Alright hold on just a second..." Angry voice rose up out of the crowd. Not all that surprising to Hopper.

"You can't keep her locked up anymore." Mike said.

"And you can't keep her away from her friends. We can make sure she's safe too. We'll take extra care to hide her." Lucas added

"Ya, but what about school? She deserves to be around kids her own age. Plus there's kind of a lot she needs to know about the world if she is ever going to live in it. That is if you plan to eventually let her outside of your prison. Oh sorry.. Safe House." Dustin chimed in. Always the wise ass.

"Hop, I'm with the kids on this. El shouldn't be alone in the middle of nowhere. I understand safety is an issue but so is El's sanity." Joyce placed her hand on Hopper's arm. Her voice of reason helped to calm the mob.

Hopper looked at everyone and then looked over at El, knowing she would have something to add, but El was quiet. She was speechless. Here were her friends fighting to see her. She'd been alone with Hopper so long she forgot how good it felt to have so many people care. El was too happy to argue.

"Chief Hopper, um.. you should probably know that, Jonathan and I might have taken care of the Hawkins lab for good.." Nancy with the help of Jonathan, explained what they had done to ensure that there wouldn't be another Barb situation in the future.

"That's great, what you guys did helps a lot. But I still think we need to keep a low profile so here are some ideas.."

There was a lot of back and forth. A *lot* of back and forth. But they

were all able to settle on some new rules:

El needed to be better educated. Hopper's word of the day was not going to cut it. Or to quote Dustin, "That's such bullshit. Hey El, lets look bullshit up in the dictionary..." Who was then smacked by Lucas. So Joyce was going to come up with a homeschool plan to get her on track. The kids would pitch in for tutoring once a month. This would coincide with the second rule.

'Release The El' day was to be the last Saturday of every month. It will be held at the Byer's house and will consist of tutoring in the morning and games/movies at night. This was an open invitation to everyone, even the older teens. Anyone who wanted to pitch in was welcome. Triple Decker Eggos Extravaganzas were mandatory if El passed her lessons with good grades. The ultimate goal was to enroll El as soon as Hopper deemed it safe. This decision was Hoppers and Hoppers alone. End of discussion. Insert intimidating Hopper glare. Then insert, teenage angsty eye rolls.

El also needed to expand her diet from eggos and tv dinners so Joyce would be coming to the safehouse at least once a week to teach El how to cook real food. It would be an easy excuse to let the community think that Joyce might be going over to Hopper's place for reasons not so innocent. But of course, this was not mentioned during the discussion though most everyone was thinking it.

Lastly and most importantly: Anytime things started to get "strange" or anything regarding the upside-down, or to use Steve's phrasing "Crazy shit. Small crazy shit. Big crazy shit just like.. all the crazy shit.. easy..." Hopper and Joyce needed to be informed immediately.

When they were done and everyone agreed to the rules, it was about mid afternoon. Joyce got up and mentioned that they could all have a nice lunch, before families were called. She, once again mentioning the attack on her fridge, and then looked over at El and decided to start her first cooking lesson.

"Don't worry it's just sandwiches. It's an easy go to when.."

"What the hell is going on?" Billy staggered into the living room looking at his sister talking to her friends next to Harrington and his

slut ex-girlfriend. Hopper stood up and promptly confronted the hostile youth. He was trying to get him away from the kids.

"Calm down Billy, everything's fine, your parents have been notified so there's no need to be.."

"My little sister runs away from home and knocks me out with some medical shit and your saying everything's okay?" Billy pushes Hopper and grabs the closest twerp he could get his hands on.

"You're going to tell me what's going on or I swear I'll rip your skinny little arms right out of.."

"Let me go!"

Unfortunately for Billy he grabbed Mike Wheeler. Even worse, he shoved Mike hard enough against the wall that it made a loud bang. Regrettably, Billy didn't see the very angry young lady behind him.

El didn't think. After everything that happened last night and after finally having Mike back and making plans to see him again soon, El witnessing someone hurting him and putting him in danger was too much. She planted her feet and raised her hand. Her pretty face transformed into a death glare. She made a fist and yanked Billy back whilst gently putting Mike back on his feet. El punched her fist in the air and Billy flew up to the ceiling with a loud smack. She then swung her hand down and Billy fell to the ground... hard... and once again unconscious.

Everyone was quite as El made her way towards Mike. She was oblivious to shocked stares everybody was giving her. Steve, Nancy, Jonathan, Joyce, and Max had never actually seen El use her powers to move things. They were told about her lifting a van and closing the gate of course, but none of them had actually seen this little girl do it.

"Holy shit," Steve whispered in awe.

"Mike are you okay?" El touched Mike's throat where she could see red marks forming. Her face was once again going angry.

"I'm okay!" Mike said quickly. "Hey look! See.. I'm fine. It'll take more

than a strong Mouthbreather to bring this paladin down. I may be skinny, but I can be pretty fast." His efforts to get her to laugh were pretty lame. But it turns out El liked Mike's lame, because she smiled and rolled her eyes.

When she turned to look at everyone and their different expressions ranging from astonishment to stunned silence, she remembered what Kali told her, 'you will always be a freak to them, Jane.' Suddenly, El was scared and didn't know what to do. Hopper was going to be very angry she used her powers, but she had to look at him. Hoping that he would still want to protect her. Even if she was a monster or a freak, he'd seen her do worse and still stood by her.. right?

Hopper had his hands on his hips and was about to scold El, when he saw the look on her face. She had been scared by the reaction of the group. Hopper knew he needed to tread carefully.

"Hey kid, come over here for a sec. Wheeler isn't going to die; he's a big boy. I just wanna talk. We never really discussed the appropriate times to use your powers." Hopper knew staying calm and speaking clearly was the best thing for this scared little power cage of a teenager.

"I would say.. this situation was a gray area. He didn't see you and no one got hurt.. well not too hurt. He's clearly breathing so that's good. Hey, we will figure out a way to deal with this, just like we like did with everything else. Okay? El, look at me." Hopper grabbed El's hands and squeezed them gently.

El sniffed. The line between a monster and a hero was a precarious line that El would forever fiddle with. She nodded her head and looked at Hopper. If Papa led the bad men, then Hopper led the good men. And she would follow his rules to the best of her ability. Thinking about what Hopper would do could help El in finding the hero rather than the monster. As El looked around she couldn't tell if they thought she was a freak, but apart of her didn't care. She knew Mike didn't think that way and Hopper didn't either, so it didn't matter. At least that was what El was going to tell herself.

"Damn. Note to self, never pick on Mike Wheeler." Steve said hoping to break the tension.

"That's right! She's our friend..." Dustin said with a grin and walked over putting an arm around El. "and she's crazy." El chuckled, remembering last years events. All of them had understood what El was after all the craziness that had been happening, seeing it was a shock to the system, but no one thought differently of her. As the tension in the room eased people went back to cleaning, cooking, or Hopper's case calling parents.

However, there was one person not smiling. Will had also never seen El use her powers. He wasn't upset at her or anything. He was worried. Very worried. He hadn't had much time to get use to his mind now that *He* was out of his head, but Will remembered everything. He couldn't feel *Him* inside anymore and the 'now-memories' were currently 'old-now-memories', but he knew *Him*. He had in a strange way, been *Him*. And Will knew that if *He* had seen El's powers, *He* would do anything to get to her like how he got to Will. Will would just have to hope that *He* could never find a way to do so.

Authors Note: Yay for the holiday weekend! I had planned to post a chapter at least once or twice a week, but not once a day. But this chapter flew and I'm rather proud of it. So proud that I didn't triple check myself. So I apologize if I might have spelling errors, but I was just so excited and I wanted to get this up before I went to sleep. Please let me know what you think and thank you to my two comments from honeylove9 and Guest (Darn it! Sign up/Log in so I can shout out to you!).

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3:

Authors Note: I'm sorry this took longer than expected, but I wanted to make sure I edited this chapter properly. When I didn't edit 2 well, it made writing 3 harder so consider it a lesson learned. Anywho, I hope you enjoy this chapter as much as I did writing it. Also I've changed the length from 2-3 chapters to 4-5. I know. Surprise surprise, I got carried away. There is just so much I want to play with. Still I hope this chapter isn't too boring. I felt it important to set a good foundation before I start skipping through the grandiose world that is "stranger things." Oh, one last thing: there is major Mileven fluff ahead. This is rated T so keep that in mind. Okay okay! On to the story!

The early November air was what most people in Hawkins would call 'nippy.' Not too cold, but gone was the warmth of summer for the year 1984. To El, the cold once represented a lonely and scary time in her life, but now it only held the promise of happy times ahead. She would miss her friends, but would see them again in exactly 20 days. The last Saturday of the month landed on the 24th. Now that El had a promised number instead of the disappointing word 'soon,' she could wait. Also, Joyce would come visit next Saturday which was on day 7.

"Now that I know you can hear me, I'll update you on the walkie talkie every chance I get." Mike was helping El put away the dishes. Joyce's lesson on sandwich making was very enlightening for El. She found she hated mustard, but enjoyed the crispy lettuce combined with the salty meat. Maybe she should try them on Eggs..

"Will you do one tonight? I want to listen. I like to hear your voice." El said and turned to see Mike blushing. She moved closer to him and smiled sweetly, it was the smile she reserved only for Mike.

"Alright enough of that. We gotta go before parents start coming to pick up their kids. Grab stuff and start loading up the truck," Hopper said and lifted a suitcase and headed outside. Joyce had been kind enough to lend El some of her clothes which were big on her, but it

smelled clean. She also packed up what food she could give to El to tide her over until Hopper could go to the store.

"I'll see you on Saturday and I should have something resembling a curriculum worked out by then. I know some parents who've done homeschooling so we should be in good shape. Also I can bring over any *stuff* you might need. So if you need anything *specific* you just tell Hopper to let me know so I can get it." Joyce gave El a pointed look. El looked confused which made Joyce smile and shake her head. *Nevermind, we will cross that bridge when we get there.*

El gave hugs to Joyce, Dustin, Lucas, and Will and an awkward handshake to Max who was only slightly disappointed. She nodded to the older teens who all waved back and El then turned to Mike who was waiting by the door. She ran to him and he caught her in a tight hug. It was a bit dramatic, but the two adolescence didn't care. Joyce was worried Hoppers eyes would roll right out of his head.

"20 days," El voice muffled in Mike's shoulder.

"19 days and 18 hours" replied Mike who reluctantly loosened his arms. El didn't step away when she looked up at him putting their faces really close.

Hopper was about to insert himself in between the two quite forcefully when a loud groan was heard coming from the floor.

Billy was, once again, waking up and trying to make his way to his feet. Thankfully, he was facing away from the door. "Where am I? What's going on?" his voice was still hostile, but far more confused than what it had been the first time. Joyce grabbed Billy before he could turn around.

"Hi Billy, you had a bit of a fall and hit your head pretty good. Don't worry, your parents are on their way to pick you and Max up.. No don't turn or move too fast you could fall down again.." Joyce looked over Billy's shoulders at El and gave her another look, a wide eyed innocent one. This time El understood.

With a small tilt of her head, Billy flew face first into the floor and was, to no one's surprise, unconscious... again.. El gave the downed

boy a disdainful sniff and looked back at Mike. Who was trying not to smile. He did notice something else though and touched his finger to her nose.

"You don't bleed anymore?" El shook her head.

"I do, but not as much. The more I have to focus, the more I bleed." She smiled at him. "I'm stronger now." El gave Mike a proud look and he smiled back not really sure what else to do. *A stronger Eleven? Oh boy..*

Hopper sighed. "Just so everyone is on the same page. I told Mr. and Mrs. Mayfield that Billy tripped and fell down the stairs and that he might have been drinking since he smelled like alcohol." Steve who was closest to the kitchen, grabbed a conveniently open bottle of liquor and sprinkled it on top of Billy's head. There were a few snorts heard across the living room.

"Worrying about his sister, could have caused poor Billy to drink and so I won't be writing him up for underage drinking, but the stories he was coming up with.. Well.. I thought it was best if Billy just got some rest. Does anyone have a problem with that? Good. Alright kid, we really got go."

Hopper and El quickly got into Hoppers truck and head out. The gang came out to watched them leave and was about to head back inside when Mike cleared his throat.

"Hey Max.. Um, I just wanted to say that you can join our party and you know.. sorry for being an asshole about it." Mike looked uncomfortable and Max was enjoying seeing him squirm.

"Why the change of heart? Is it because El's back?" Max said as Dustin and Lucas got closer. They were not going to miss this. Will, who had still been watching the tire tracks left by Hoppers truck and had been deep in thought, looked over at Mike, curious to hear his answer.

"I guess.. I was upset about you joining the party because it felt like you were taking El's place .. and i know it's stupid so .. sorry... Also it might be good for El to be around a girl her own age." Mike put his hand forward in truce.

"Wait, your saying that the only reason you're okay with me joining the party is because it would be better for El?" Max was stunned. This wasn't really where she thought this apology was going to go.

"Ya." Mike said simply. Almost like there was a silent, 'duh.' That didn't need to be said.

Max still had her mouth open. Is this kid for real? One track mind is an understatement. Max knew Mike cared a lot about El. I mean it was common knowledge, but she was finally starting to understand just how much Mike's feelings for El ran. Max looked at the hand, signed, and then shook it. It kind of made sense. It was thoroughly exasperating, but it was also kind of endearing. Seeing Mike being so hung up on El.. well .. Max kind of hoped one day a boy would feel that way about her.. I mean stalking came pretty close right?

"Plus having a Zoomer, in the party could be kind of cool." Mike smirked. Dustin, Lucas, and Will all chuckled. It was good to solidify the parties ties and Max started to relax.

"Let's hope I can impress El with my zoomer skills. She's one tough cookie..." Max said and everyone chuckled at the understatement. Max was determined to get El to like he, especially after seeing her toss Billy like a rag doll. God, that was awesome.

The party headed back inside to wait for their parents to come pick them up. As the door closed, a man hiding in the bushes whispered into his mouthpiece, "Subject has left the Byer's home. Two patrols are following. Standing by for orders."

"Stay hidden, orders are to remain invisible. Take no action."

"Copy that."

El and Hopper made it back to the safe house with just enough daylight to clean up the broken glass and put up wooden boards to block the cold out.

They ate their leftover sandwiches by the fire in a comfortable silence. "So .. what do you think of our new rules? You didn't say much when we were making them."

"I like them a lot." El smiled. "I get to see my friends in 20 days," she looked over at Hooper and grew serious. "I know you are scared, but I will be safe. I promise." El could feel herself getting sleepy again. She was still drained from the previous day, but she also felt a sense of purpose. She had come back to save her friends and though she closed the gate, she could still sense the presence of the Mind flayer in the upside down.

She had felt it's unhappiness and panic when El started closing the gate, but there was another feeling El sensed coming from that shadowy figure.. and it made her nervous. What she had to do now was just prepare for the worse. Kali had taught her how to grow her gifts. She could push her mind to be stronger and not using her powers, wasn't going to be an option this time. To El, if she was here to save her friends she would need to be ready. Thank goodness the new rules didn't mention anything about her not using her powers. Hopper probably thought it was a given so technically El wasn't breaking the rules if she practiced. A part of her knew that it would only be a matter of time before the Mind flayer figured out a way to get to this side again. When he did El would be ready.

"I know you wanted to visit Mike tonight, but you look like you're going to pass out. I think the kid would understand if you.."

"I'm fine. I can visit while I sleep," El said while getting up to throw away their sandwich bags.

"Oh. Well, that's new. You usually need the blindfold and static.."

"I've gotten stronger," El said simply and gave Hopper a sweet smile. She could tell that Hopper was surprised about this new development.

"Well... that's good then." Hopper said trying to not show his unease. He was on unfamiliar ground once again. What is the right answer in this situation? Should he pry about exactly what changes have taken place because she's "stronger?" I mean they had only been without each other for a couple days. How much stronger could she have gotten? If he pried, would she get frightened again. When Hopper weighed the consequences, he decided it was better to just have her back for now. Prying can come later. Hopper smiled and gave El a

side hug.

"I'm glad your back kid. I know I'm not the easiest person to get along with, but I care a lot about you and I want you to know that. Okay?... Alright, I'm done being mushy." He wasn't crying or anything. It was just a little dust in his eye from all the cleaning earlier.

"Me too. I missed you and I care a lot about you too." El wasn't good at expressing herself, but she cared a lot about Hopper and was very happy to have him in her life.

"Good night. And please don't dream about the Wheeler kid too much... I just .. nevermind." Hopper turned to shut his door and then listen to El shut hers. What was he going to do about that? Go to sleep and not think about it, that's what. *It's not like they were old enough to even know how to get into that sort of trouble ... right? 13.. Did I know what was what at 13? ... Oh god..*

El wasn't sure why Hopper got so .. funny whenever she mentioned Mike. So shrugged it off and went to her room and laid down on her bed. She barely had to think of Mike for him to show up in her mind. She really was getting good at this. It helped when that person was close to El not physically, but emotionally. For example, it hadn't mattered that she was in Chicago, she was still able to visit Hopper and Mike because they were the so familiar to her. She also figured out that if a person were thinking of her as well, it was easier to visit them. So that's why it surprised her to pull up Mike so easily, because he obviously wasn't ready to be visited.

Mike was brushing his teeth in the bathroom. El wasn't sure what to do. She felt a little shy at being able to see him like this. He was so ... pretty? .. hm..she knew there was a better word, but all El could think to do is happily stand there and watch him brush his teeth. That was until he took off his shirt and pants to change into his pajamas.

El gasped. She had been taught about privacy and remembered her friends reaction when she tried to change in front of them. Though she had been told that you were suppose to change in private, she still didn't really understand what the fuss was about. Now... well, she was starting to understand.. Her eyes traveled along Mike's slim

form. She saw his naked chest and legs. She covered her mouth with her hands and could feel her cheeks on fire. Her heart was beating fast and she couldn't seem to catch her breath. It took her awhile to swallow and realize that she should probably turn around. So El turned, but she was still listening intently to the rustle of clothing coming from behind her. She was not going to turn around, but she also couldn't make herself leave the void all together. Just how much privacy was private?

"Alright! I'm almost done..God!.. Bathrooms all yours your highness." Mike sighed and started walking forward. He walk right through El and reappeared in front of her fully clothed. Mike paused for a second and looked behind him confused. He thought he felt something... weird. Mike shook his head, he chalked it up to the side effects of the last few days. He started to head down stairs and El followed him as he made his way to the basement. Now that she was in more familiar territory she let herself relax. Well, as relaxed as she could be with her heart beating so fast. It didn't help that she kept replaying Mike without a shirt on repeat. Oh dear, a dream circle of Mike while he took his shirt off on repeat... El shook her head trying to clear it. *Focus! Mike is saying something.*

"El, it's me. I guess this is Day 1.. um... Now that I know you're there it's kind of weird, I'm not sure what to talk about. Lets see, after you left this afternoon, we basically cleaned up Mrs. Byers house while waiting for our parents to pick us up. Oh ya! I wish you could have seen Billy and Max get picked up. Billy had a hard time remembering the events of last night. He also looked really scared when he saw his dad. Mr. Mayfield was not happy about Billy being drunk. Apparently, this wasn't the first time Billy has passed out .. Honestly though, Mr. Mayfield gave me the creeps. Makes me feel just a tiny bit bad for Billy. We also officially let Max be apart of the party. She's okay. You'll probably like her once you get to know her. I know Lucas and Dustin sure do. Which reminds me, one day you'll have to tell me why you came to school and left without saying anything. You knew I was .. well .. I guess it doesn't really matter.." Mike sighed and looked troubled.

"El, I'm so glad you're back and knowing you are listening is great, better than great, but it's also harder too, which is so weird, but it's

like.. now that i know you are there .. it's like you're so close.. closer than i could have hoped for a week ago, but yet.." Mike reached his hand out as if he could touch her. Mike couldn't have know that his hand was actually right in next to her face, just an inch or so away from her cheek. El, knowing that her powers were stronger thought that maybe .. she would try to touch him. Even if it meant risking him disappearing like before? Hadn't she dreamed of him this morning and woken up when she touched him. But still, it would make sense that if she concentrated a lot she might be able to.. As she reached her hand out to his he put his hand down. Her hand passed right through his and Mike didn't have any reaction this time. El looked down disappointed.

"I'm sorry. I know I'm being a downer. I ... I hope you are staying warm it's supposed to drop to 35 tonight. So um.. Ya .." Mike was trying not to let it show that he was upset. Especially because he really shouldn't be. He was just being a little bitch.. during Mikes small talk on the weather.. El had been inching her way closer to Mike, still trying to decide if she would try to touch him.

"I'll be on the walkie talkie tomorrow night. I can't believe I have school tomorrow. It seems a little ridiculous to have to go to school after all of this. But I guess I should probably head to bed." El's face was now inches away from Mike's. She enjoyed looking at him. Why hadn't she gotten this close before? She could see his freckles moving as he talked. Slowly she reached her hand toward his cheek. She wanted to touch those spots and see if they were as soft as they looked. She concentrated and pulled on her anger at not being next to him, of hearing the longing in his voice and not being able to go to him.

"I hope you have a goodnight El. Sleep w..." Mike stopped and put a hand on his cheek. He could have sworn that he had felt something touch it. Could it be El?.. Mike shook his head, he really did need to get some sleep. El on the other hand had a big smile on her face. Her hand had still passed through his cheek except for that first initial moment. She had felt his warm skin. It was possible to touch him! She would just need more practice.

"Sleep well, Eleven." Mike smiled softly and got up and walked back up the stairs. El felt herself fade out of the void. She saw Mike's

silhouette fade and El let the exhaustion of the evening combined with the last couple of days take her into a normal dream where she was floating into the warm speckled abyss that was Mike's freckles.

Days 2-6 took on a similar pattern of:

- Wake up to eat Eggos (two maximum). They would take inventory on what Hopper needed to buy for repairs and plan out a to do list for Eleven.

- Around 8, Hopper would leave for work and El did her to do list which usually consisted of cleaning the safehouse and reading books to practice for Saturday with Joyce. Only on Day 2 did this change when Hopper got Aunt Becky's message from Flo. El had to explain taking her money, which turned into an all morning lecture while they drove to Aunt Becky's house to give her back the money El took. El would be paying that back to Hopper with lots of chores and Aunty Becky wanted a visit from El, at least once a month. She said Terry would really like that. All in all, El felt like she was getting more of a reward then a punishment from the whole exchange.

- Lunch was a sandwich, which El found out on Day 3 did, in fact, taste great on eggos and then got in trouble on Day 4 when Hopper found out. The rule of two eggos maximum extended through the whole day, not just breakfast.

- After lunch, Eleven was to finish her to do list and then finish off her day with some T.V. before Hopper came home. What Hopper didn't know is that when El cleaned, she did it with only her powers and before her T.V time, she would practice. El organized herself and her abilities so she can start practicing them like she did with Kali.

You'd think she would have done this earlier, but El had never thought of her powers as anything other than something that brought her trouble. When Papa would ask her to use them, it would hurt her head and make her tired. If she refused, she would be punished or locked away. Her gifts had been a burden. Now, El saw that she could use them to help those she cared about. She no longer held those negative feelings, instead she wanted to embrace them, to organize them, and to figure out just what was she capable of.

First and most useful, was her ability to move things without touching them. She knew the others thought it was like pulling or pushing, but it wasn't. She didn't have to use her eyes to move things and neither did she put pressure on any one side. Eleven moved what she could feel. She sensed the object, sense how it was shaped and sensed how it can move, then she moved it. She showed it where she wanted it to go and so it went. Which she knew wouldn't make sense even if she was able to express herself.

Second, she had access to the void. Papa had given it that name when she was asked to seek out the Demogorgon. She could find someone if she were given a likeness of them. It didn't have to be a picture. It could be a little wizard figurine, named Will the Wise. It just had to have a connection to that person and she could locate them in the void.

Third, she could project what she heard in the void on to something else. So far she was able to project onto speakers, but El hadn't played a lot with this power and wondered if she could project onto other things. Maybe a T.V. or even someone's mind. It would be similar to what Kali did, or so she imagined. Not knowing her capabilities, would be a good thing when trying out what to practice.

Fourth.. El paused. She didn't like to think about this one. She had only ever used it 3 times. And all 3 times had been dangerous. Once on the Demogorgon, once on the Mind flyer, and once a long time ago. The first time she used it she had been told to never used this power again. That if she did she would be gone... just like Mr. Lion. Eleven was told that because Papa had been there for her, they had save her and made her better. However, she was asleep for a week afterward and it had everyone worried. She had never seen Papa so worried.

Eleven..

"Eleven, I want you to open the egg." Dr. Brenner said.

Eleven looked at the white object that Papa called "egg," but didn't understand what Papa meant. She looked at the egg and then with her powers she sensed the egg. She closed her eyes and focused. She could feel the tiny pieces of the shell and how they wove together. As she went

further, she could feel all the little holes, but she was still not sure how to open it so she went deeper and could feel her nose bleeding again. Eleven sensed the microscopic branches that held it together, but she still couldn't figure out how she was suppose to "open" them. There was no door on the egg. Maybe if she unweaved the branches she would find one? She tried at first, but they were very stuck and Eleven realized she was getting very tired. She opened her eyes and looked back to Papa and shook her head.

Papa gave her a sad look and then took out her stuffed lion.

"Now Eleven... I don't want to cut open Mr. Lion, but I need you to open the egg, if you don't open the egg, I'm going to have to use Mr. Lion to help you. We don't want Mr. Lion to get hurt.. so please don't make me hurt Mr. Lion."

"Papa! No!" Eleven was mortified. Mr. Lion was given to her by Papa after she squished the can and Eleven never liked being parted from him. If Mr. Lion was cut open who would she cuddle at night? Who would comfort her after the bad men would hurt her and who would be there when she was let out of the dark room. She would rub her face in his soft fur and pretend that her body didn't ach from the lightning sticks or how she was barely able to swallow from the searing pain in her throat caused from all her screaming.

Eleven looked back at the egg and tried harder. She tugged at those branches and it still wouldn't budge. Both of her nostrils started bleeding this time and she could hear her breathing getting loader. Eleven was so exhausted she was having a hard time keeping her eyes open. Papa brought out the knife and cut open Mr. Lions tummy.

"No! Papa, please!" Eleven cried weakly.

"Open the egg, Eleven."

Eleven looked at the egg again and tried even harder. She gripped the edges of the table and clenched her jaw. She grabbed the branches at the top of the egg shell and tried to pull them apart. She could feel a couple of the branches move this time, but when she opened her eyes the egg looked the same.

"Papa.. I did it a little.." Elevens voice trembled from exhaustion and she

could hear her breathing becoming more labored. Dr. Brenner shook his head.

"A little is not good enough Eleven. I want you to open it." He cut a line through 's head.

"No!"

"Open the egg Eleven."

"Papa.. please.." Brenner sighed and shook his head. Their sensor's needles had shown so much frequency more than they had ever seen from 011 before, he was so sure she would do it. Dr. Brenner, honestly, didn't think this would have been harder for her than the coke can. Another disappointing subject. He had held great hopes for 011.

"Say goodbye to Mr. Lion, Eleven."

"No!" Eleven screamed. She could feel herself shaking as she looked again at the egg and then at Mr. Lion whose stuffing was falling out. His soft fur, falling to the table. Oh please open egg. Please!

Eleven felt for the branches again. Her eyes opened just in time to see Papa slide his knife across Mr. Lion's neck severing the head from the body.

"Say goodbye, Eleven."

Eleven screamed in anguish and in pain as she grabbed those branches and ripped them apart. Her head felt like she had ripped it open. Both her nostrils and ears were bleeding and her tears felt sticky. Then as quickly as the pain had come it had vanished. Everything went dark and Eleven gratefully went into the blackness where there was no pain, no bad Papa, and no more tests. A place where her and Mr. Lion were cuddled safe and warm in bed.

As Dr. Brenner grabbed Eleven before she fell from the chair, he knew he had made a mistake somewhere. He had pushed her too hard, but how? Dr. Brenner started panicking when he couldn't feel her pulse. They rushed her immediately to the hospital wing to revive her. It took them a couple tries but they got her heart beating again. Brenner couldn't believe that it was possible to push one of the subjects so far they they could kill

themselves. It had never happened before and was very worrisome. Eleven was his most prized subject. She had exhibited the most amazing abilities yet. They had always hoped for a subject like her and when she fell into his hands.. well.. losing her was not an option..

The lab had asked him to come see her results on the egg asap, but almost losing Eleven had frozen him to the spot next to her bed. Once the doctors said that she was stable and would be fine, Dr. Brenner finally let himself be dragged to the analysis room.

"Before we begin with the results, Eleven's testing will be triple checked by at least 5 specialists to ensure this never happens again. I want us to figure out what went wrong and how something so simple as opening an egg could cause her heart to stop. I want this to be completed by the time she wakes up. Does everyone understand!" Brenner's voice had increased in volume until he shouted that last sentence. He took a long shaky breath and turned to the frightened analyst. No one had seen Brenner ever lose his cool. It left everybody speechless and terrified.

"What are the results" he said in a calm collected voice while his eyes promised a slow death if the news they had for him was unsatisfactory.

"Well Dr. Brenner, the subject was in fact, able to open the egg... But sir, see the top part of the egg .. Sir.. well... it's completely gone."

"What?" Brenner stepped up to the table to inspect the perfectly halved raw egg. There was a clean straight horizontal line that halved the egg which sat perfectly still in it's holder. Around the egg were tiny pieces of what looked to be... ash? It was so fine that Brenner almost missed it.

"What am I looking at?" Dr. Brenner was equally amazing and confused at what he was seeing.

"The top half, sir .. well.. We think that it's been.. completely disintegrated sir... and the fine dust around on the table, is what is left of the top." The analyst paused and took a loud swallow.

"Some of us think that if the subject has never seen an egg being cracked open before .. well then she might not have known what we meant when we asked her to open an egg."

The room was silent. No one knew what to say. No one knew exactly how to proceed. No one understood what the implications of this meant. Brenner couldn't contain the glee that rose up inside him and a big smile appeared on his face. What a treasure we have found.

It was a week before Eleven woke up. The nurse made a call and Papa was there.. with Mr. Lion?

"Eleven, how are you feeling?" Papa put the stuffed lion in front of Eleven, who instantly knew that it wasn't really Mr. Lion, he didn't feel right. Eleven frowned at the stuffed animal and looked at Dr. Brenner. She wasn't sure what to say, she felt very sad about Mr. Lion, angry that Papa had taken him away, and angry at herself for not being able to save Mr. Lion by opening the egg. She started to cry and Dr. Brenner put his arm around her. It was this moment that Eleven started to realize that Papa was bad. Just like the bad men who hurt her, but he was her Papa. She was so confused about everything. Eleven started to cry harder.

Papa explained to her later that she was never to use her powers like that again. He tried to explain that he had almost lost Eleven and that she had almost been gone, just like Mr. Lion. Papa was very adamant that she only move the objects and never ever "open" them. Eleven remembered the pain she had felt when she had tried to "open" the egg so it wasn't hard rule to follow. It was soon after these events that Eleven and Dr. Brenner discovered the void. It was the same black emptiness she fell into before waking up. She had never seen it before that day. That day she had lost Mr. Lion.

Eleven had recalled these events on the night she used her powers to "open" the Demogorgon. She remembered Papa telling her to say goodbye to Mr. Lion and El realized that by using this power on the Demogorgon... she too would be gone. She understood that she wouldn't get to see Mike and her friends again, but the Demogorgon need to be gone. Gone to a place where he couldn't hurt anyone. But this time, Eleven would make sure she said goodbye. Mike was her friend and had come to mean more to her than Mr. Lion had. She wouldn't forget to say goodbye this time.

How she had ended up in the upside down, was still a mystery to El. A mystery she was fine with. Not everything had to have an explanation and she had bigger things on her mind at the moment.

It was almost 9:00 pm and Mike usually reached out to her around this time. That was the last part of her routine. Hopper came home, they ate T.V dinners, talked about their day, and then got ready for bed. Since she didn't need the static from the T.V to visit Mike, Hopper didn't know for sure just how many times El visited Mike during the nights and she would never tell him. Just in case he decided to make another rule about it. She made sure to not watch Mike if he were in the bathroom, because that meant he had closed the door and when the door was closed it was considered private. But she liked to watch him walk down the stairs or interact with his family. Eleven liked how expressive Mike was, how gentle he was with his little sister, Holly, and how aggressive he was with his parents. She hoped one day to meet them. She liked Nancy, but hadn't had much opportunity to talk to her. Maybe Nancy would come visit Eleven on Day 20.

"Hey El, it's Day 6 and I can't believe it's almost been a week since I've seen you. Feels like a month. Lucas, Dustin, Max, and Will say, 'Hi.' Will says Mrs. Byers is very excited to see you tomorrow. She's been practicing what she is planning to teach you." Mike chuckled and El found herself smiling at the sound. "Apparently, Mrs. Byers isn't very good at cooking, but she offered to teach you because she didn't think she could be worse than T.V dinners." Mike couldn't help but laugh a little while imagining what Mrs. Byers teaching El to cook.

"I wish I could send my Mom over to teach you. She's probably the best cook in our neighborhood. You remember her meatloaf? My favorite is her lasagna" Eleven scrunched her nose at the sound of that food. Las-on-ya. That didn't sound very yummy.

"Tomorrow is game night and we usually play D&D. I was thinking about reaching out to you with everyone else here so you don't have to always hear from me. I'm sure you're getting board hearing about my day so it might be nice to hear everyone else's take on how lame everything is without you." Mike snorted and looked around the basement. His face lost it's smile.

"When you finally don't have to hid from the bad men anymore, you can come over and play D&D with us. I can start creating a character for you. I was thinking about a mage, but you can pick whatever.."

Mike stopped talking. Was he seeing things or did the antenna on his walkie talkie just move.

El had been trying to see if she could move that darn metal stick since Day 4. She hadn't been able to touch Mike again on Day 2 so she thought she would try something else. It had taken her almost the whole conversation on Day 4 to finally feel the walkie talkie. Then on Day 5, she was able to focus on the antenna, but still hadn't been able to move it. Tonight, it had finally listened and Mike had seen!

"El? .. am I going crazy or did you just .. no.. no way.." Mike was stunned. He wasn't sleep deprived this time, but she'd never been able to do this before. Mike jumped up so fast El almost fell over. She watched him walk away to grab something and then came back to sit down. She couldn't see what he had grabbed at first which was no surprise. She couldn't see the room just the space around Mike. When Mike introduced something to his space she had to closed her eyes and reached for Mike again to see it.

"I'm not sure if I've gone off the deep end here, but if you are there maybe you can write something. Anything.. I mean.. If you can.." Mike set down his open notebook and pen feeling a bit foolish.

El was drained from moving the antenna. Seeing the paper and pen though, it was such a good idea that she had to at least give it a try. But what would she write. She didn't have much energy left so it would have to be short. Eleven smiled. She knew exactly what she wanted to put on that paper to let Mike know, without a doubt, just who was reaching out to him. Which was silly, since how many other people could move things with their mind?

El took a deep breath and focused on the pen. She felt its shape and saw how it should move. She saw how it should sit straight and make a long rotation. Her head was starting to hurt and her breath became labored, but she needed to finish this. She felt the path the pen needed to take to make the lines, first vertically and then horizontally. Eleven was shaking when she was done and could barely hold on to the image of Mike in the void. But it was all worth it to see Mike's face light up.

"Holy shit! El, I can't believe it! That's incredible! When did you..

How did you.. Oh my god.. This is.." El didn't hear the rest. She must have pushed herself harder than she thought, because she was falling into her dream abyss. Mike's face being the last thing she thought about before the darkness took over. His reaction was exactly what she had been hoping to see when she drew her beloved egg.

Authors Note: Gah! Alright,I should have chapter four up by this weekend. I know what I want to write so it's just finding the time to write it. Lastly, huge thank yous to SSJGamerYT (you made my day) and RWHG8. My continued thanks to honeylove90 and a gracias to Alba Zoel. I hope you all enjoy this chapter.

4. Chapter 4

Chapter: 4

"Hey kid, your breakfast is getting cold." Hopper knocked on Eleven's door, but there was no answer.

"Eleven?" He opened the door and saw her still sleeping. "Kid, you okay?" Hopper said hile gently shaking El awake. She rolled over and smiled sleepily at Hopper when he saw the dried blood on her nose and a few spots on her pillow.

"El..." Hopper sighed. He knew he should have said something earlier, but part of him wished that El would just .. not visit the Wheeler kid? Wishful thinking mixed with denial should not surprise a father figure so. "Listen, I know you visit Mike at night, but try to not visit so long, okay? It's okay to not listen to him when you get tired. I mean it's not like he's going to know. Hey... El you okay?" Hopper watched as El tried to stand up only to fall back to the bed.

"I'm fine, just tired. I stayed up too late. Sorry. Won't happen again." El smiled at Hopper And he got a good looks at the bags under her eyes.

"Next time, Bed by 10, okay? Joyce will be here at noon, which is in a couple of hours so get up and eat your cold breakfast and get ready." Hopper left El's room to giver her privacy, but not before El detected a difference in Hopper.

"You smell." El kept sniffing loudly as she got closer to Hopper. He turned pink and mumbled something El could hear. "Your shirt. It's new and you did something to your hair." El was confused and Hopper just turned around to continue cleaning up.

"I put on cologne. It's just so it doesn't smell so bad in here and.. Someone was giving this shirt away at work .. and my hair.. You know what? No more questions. Go eat your breakfast." Hopper stomped off to organize the bookshelf. El smiled and got to work.

"Now don't you worry. I've read "Home Grown Kids" and most of

"Home-Spun Schools" so I know what I'm doing.. For the most part." Joyce said to El who was still eyeing the dubious pile of books. She had to complete all of this?

"When Will came back, there was a lot of talk from my friends about keeping him at home so they gave me these books, just in case. I think it will be perfect for getting you on track. So let's go ahead and find out where you are."

It turned out to be pretty bad. El knew her alphabets and could sound out words. Her vocab, they had known, was going to need a lot of work. What they hadn't know was that all her other skills were in the same boat. She could do addition and subtraction which El found enjoyable. However, her penmanship, comprehension, grammar, spelling, history, science, and literature were in their very early stages, if non existent.

By the time they finished their plan, El wasn't sure about the whole thing. That was a lot to cover in one week. Hopper and Joyce were patient, but El could feel an underlying tension in the room. Hopper was clearly upset which was making El nervous.

"I can do it." El said in her most confident voice. She gave Hopper a look that said she would not let him down and grabbed the first book she could reach and opened it. She wanted to show Hopper that she was going to start being serious about her studies now. Unfortunately, the book was upside down and it took El a full 30 seconds to realize this before very slowly turning it right side up. She looked at Hopper hoping he hadn't noticed. Hopper gave her a lopsided smile and rubbed the mop of curls on her head.

"I know kid, I'm just upset at how badly they neglected your education. I mean they didn't even try to teach you the basics." Hopper sighed and looked at Joyce who had a sad smile on her face.

"We both know you can do it so don't worry yourself. These things take time and we've got lots of that. However, I only have 3 hours left to teach you how to make a delicious chicken salad. So let's get crackin'" Joyce, Hopper, and El finished off the night with music, embarrassing Hopper stories, and lots of horribly chopped vegetables.

El reached out to Mike and the gang while drifting off to sleep. They were having a sleepover. It had been a long day for El and so she wasn't able to do much other than listen. It was nice seeing everyone and hearing about school and something called a turkey trot. Apparently, there was one happening next weekend and everyone was being forced by their mother's to join in. Mike was unusually quiet, he looked like there was a lot he wanted to say, but held back. El wasn't sure why and got sad when she realized that asking him about it was going to be near impossible.

El slipped into another pattern for Days 8 - 13. She followed Joyce's schedule during the day and would practice her powers at night when she visited Mike. They had set specific hours for every subject and she found she went a lot faster in math and science, then she did with english and history. Still she promised she would do her best and tried to keep that promise.

As for her progress with her powers, she hadn't been able to do any more that write, "Hi" before feeling the blackness start creeping up on her. She didn't want to blackout on Mike again and by Day 12, she could write "Hi, Mike." It helped that everytime she lifted the pen Mike's face would light up with excitement. She was still a long way from where she wanted to be, but she was proud of her progress. On Day 13 which was called Friday, Mike told her about something called Thanksgiving and it was his mom's favorite holiday. She was going to be cooking lots of dishes whose names only made El's head spin. She did pick up "turkey" since everyone was going to the turkey trot without her. Anytime they were off doing things she couldn't do, she made a note of so that next year she would make sure she got that opportunity and didn't miss out on anything.

"I'm gonna see if I can save you a slice of her pumpkin pie. It's my favorite and it's usually gone the next day, but if I hide it from Holly and my dad it might make it to you. I can't believe I'm gonna see you in 7 days. I hope your studies are going well and if you have any questions I can help answer them. I'm pretty decent in math, my worst subject is PE." Mike's face went sad again. "But i'm sure you aren't being allowed out of the safehouse so physical education isn't high on your list of 'to-know.'" Mike sighed and punched a pillow El couldn't see. "I just hate that you don't get to leave. I know we get to

see you soon so technically you aren't a prisoner, but in way you are and I hate it. Sometimes I get so angry about it and I know there's nothing I can do about it. I know that Hopper would find a way to lock me up if I got you out of there and we ran away from all this bullshit." Mike looked down and when he looked back up El could see the fire had gone out of his eyes and he looked really tired.

"Sorry.. They held Bob's funeral yesterday and I can't help but feel like... like it was all my fault." Mike signed and looked at the ceiling. "If I had just figured out the spy sooner and we got out of there quicker.. I know it's stupid.. Sorry..I know you didn't get to meet him, but he was a good guy." Mike rubbed his eyes and El moved forward to see Mike's face up close. The sadness she saw there made her heart ache. She reached her hand forward and concentrated. She knew this was going to be harder than writing a message, but he looked so sad. She concentrated on her sadness and on her despair. Her anger at not being there for Mike, again and again.

Mike gasped. El was able to touch his cheek. Not with her fingertips, but with her whole hand. She could feel the smooth warmth of his face in her palm. El knew she was going to blackout again, but watching Mike's reaction was priceless.

"El?.." Mike couldn't believe what was happening. He couldn't see her, but he knew her hand was on his face, he slowly raised his own hand to his cheek until his fingers touched something that was definitely not his face. His mouth dropped open in surprise and he ever so slowly moved his fingers up until he could lay his hand on her hand. His smile made El's heartbeat that was already going fast due to strain to speed up. When Mike had placed his hand on hers, he was able to tell the hand was a small dainty hand that was slightly colder than his own.. and was... trembling? Mike squeezed her hand to give her comfort and then it disappeared. It had felt like a bubble popping or an overblown balloon that finally gave out.

El happily went into the blackness. She felt content and proud and.. well something else. Her mind felt... different. She wasn't able to focus on exactly why it was .. different.. just that she had never felt it before now. It was like her head had been pulled to make it longer, but that didn't make any sense and it wasn't painful.. just uncomfortably stretched. She had a hard time focusing on the feeling

so El stopped worrying about. She was sure it would go away after she got some rest. And it did... sort of...

"I knew you were going to be a sponge!" exclaimed Joyce.

She was a little quieter today and thanks to Mike, El knew why. No one talked about Bob's funeral and El wasn't going to bring it up. Joyce was here to check on El's progress and to get away from all the sadness that waited for her at home. During the week El had flown through math and science, but her history and english were still well below where they were hoping she would be and El once again felt the tension in the room pick up.

"I'm sorry. I will try my hardest to catch up." El said and looked at Hopper who seemed to be angrier after her apology. Joyce immediately turned El to look at her.

"Oh no sweetheart. You do not need to apologize for anything. You are perfectly fine and we are going to help you get caught up so there is no need to worry." Joyce said and it looked like she really believed they could. El relaxed a bit and left the table to use the restroom. El was also feeling frustrated with herself especially when the comparison between the two subjects were so great.

"Was something wrong with her?" El froze. It was a question she had been asking herself, but that voice wasn't hers. Hopper and Joyce were talking in the kitchen and hadn't seen her come out of the bathroom.

"Give her time Hop. It's only been a week and god only knows what they did to her in those labs. She's coming along really well on her math.. I mean she's basically mastered arithmetic in a week.. I'm gonna have go back get algebra ready. Also her grasp on the basic sciences .. I mean it's amazing..

"But her english, Joyce. Her vocab. She's still barely able to do more than sound out words. I'm just scared that she missed out on some vital learning skill when she was a baby. I mean normal people talk to their kids constantly and because of that early learning those kids don't have this much trouble picking up words. I wonder if Eleven's brain might be a little broken if she had no one to interact with her

as a child. I mean children learn their words first from their parents and that man.. her Papa..." Hopper spat that word out like a curse. "who knows what that manipulative mother fu..

"El!" Joyce said after turning around a spotting El as she walked into the kitchen. El walked right up to the sink and grabbed up cup. She filled it up with water, pretending like she hadn't heard their conversation.

"Spas-getti?" El asked turning to Joyce with an innocent smile.

"Of course! Now that we have a lesson plan for this week we can get this Spa-getti party on a roll." Joyce grabbed the first pot she could find and started filling it with water. It turned out to be frying pan, but she didn't care. What she cared about was Hopper's reaction. They weren't able to tell just how much of the conversation El had over heard, but her pretending that it didn't happen was a sign to let it go for now. Joyce gave Hopper the leave-it-alone look which thankfully he seemed to understand.

"Spaghetti is one of my favorite dishes while growing up. I hope I don't mess it up for us." Hopper said while unpacking the ingredients while trying to smile through his worry.

El learned a lot that night. One, Joyce's cooking didn't always taste better than the T.V dinners. Two, she loved having Joyce around, especially how her and Hopper would interact with each other. And lastly, there might actually be something wrong with her. El always wondered, why she had these abilities and now she wondered why she had such a hard time with words, but hearing that her head was broken.. It made more sense then her just being special or untutored.

After hearing what Hopper said, El wasn't sure how she felt. She remembered always being quiet. Being loud brought you attention and she never wanted that. When she said nothing they would forget about her, they wouldn't make her do things that were hard or bad and she couldn't disappointed them when she was either too weak or refused. If she didn't disappoint them, then she wouldn't get punished.

Papa had always said that she was special and after meeting her

friends and knowing that not everyone can do what she could do, she thought he was right. However, her having these powers, might have had a different reason and after hearing Hopper say she was broken.. it fit better. She was broken.

Kali had said that they had a wound. That they needed to heal this wound or it would fester and rot. However, to Kali's dismay, El couldn't heal herself in the same way Kali was. She didn't want to be bad, even if the men deserved to die. She wouldn't be like the bad men. El had found another way to heal her wound; to heal her broken. She would protect her friends.

Later that night, as Hopper and El were getting ready to go to sleep, El whispered something and Hopper asked her to say it louder.

"I'm sorry I'm not making much.. prog.. progress. I will try harder this week."

"Oh no El. You are making fantastic progress. A year ago you were barely talking and now look at you. I couldn't be prouder." Hopper grabbed El and gave her a hug. El released a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding.

"You know what? I was wondering what you thought about going somewhere special for Thanksgiving? I talked to Dr. Owens the other day, because I wanted to make sure he understood that he had an obligation to help you get your life on track..

"Ob.. obligation?" El asked. She was already wearing a smile from just the mention of getting out of the safehouse.

"It means something you have to do, no matter what. Similar to making promises. Anyways, Dr. Owen's said that with Brenner and the majority of his staff gone, he could ask around without any trouble coming our way. They just finished the clean up this week. That's why Bob's funeral was held so late. The people at the lab had a lot of work to do in covering that one up." Hopper was trying the gage the situation and how El would react to his offer.

"I wanted to know what you thought about us going over to see your Mama and Aunt Becky for thanksgiving? I know you probably miss

them and.. well thanksgiving is about spending time with your family and .. they are your family so..

"Yes!" El's face was lit with excitement. She knew Mama's head was a dream circle, but she still wanted to see both her and Aunt Becky. Her family. Wait..

"You are my family too." El gave Hopper a determined face. She'd realized that when Hopper had talked about his little girl, they had fought because he was scared for El's safety, just like his Sarah's. El wasn't an expert about relationships between people, but she knew Hopper was what a good papa should be.

Hopper was taken aback by her statement. Of course, he thought of El as more than a ward to protect, but he didn't want to confuse her. Her association with a father figure was that psychopath. So he grinned and gave El another good squeeze.

"Ya, you're my family too. Just so you know, I haven't asked your Aunt Becky yet, so I hope you don't get your hopes up, but last time we were there she mentioned you could come over anytime so.." Hopper paused. He felt that he needed to say this before they went to sleep, just in case she had heard all of his conversation with Joyce.

"El, I want this trip to be your reward for working so hard at your studies. You are doing so well and I couldn't be prouder. I really couldn't be. Also, you aren't a prisoner and i'll let you know what your Aunt Becky says when I call her tomorrow, since it's already late tonight." Hopper was uncomfortable with expressing his emotions so he released El and turned towards his room.

"G'night." El said as she watched an emotional Hopper turn around. She understood that some topics were hard for Hopper. It was kind of sweet.

"Goodnight, El."

It didn't surprise to Hopper to hear Becky said yes. The poor lady seemed slightly desperate to make amends for ever doubting her sister and El was the perfect way to go about doing that.

"What size clothes does she wear? How big are her feet? Oh, and do you know what type of food she likes to eat. I'll make sure we have it on our table..."

"Okay Becky, breath. I'm not entirely sure what her size is, but I'll find out and let you know tomorrow. She's just as excited to see you both so..."

"She can stay with us, you know. I mean, I understand if you think it's unsafe, but maybe once and awhile? I got a twin bed for her the other day, just in case. It would just be really nice to see her and..."

"We can talk about it more on Thursday. I have to get back to work, but one last thing Becky..."

"Yeah..."

"She likes eggos..."

"Waffles? Um, okay. I'll make sure we have some. Thanks for the heads up. See you both Thursday." Becky couldn't believe it. She had been hoping to see Jane soon, but with all the things Terry had told about the people who took Jane, crazy talk she hadn't believed, mind you. She was surprised Hopper was willing to take the chance. Maybe things had quieted down since that time. I mean if these people had done those horrible things Terry had talked about, she could only imagine what they had done to Jane and what they would do to those kept her from them, especially Brenner.

Thankfully, Thursday came quickly and as discussed, Jane would arrive at 4:00 am and leave at midnight just as a precaution.

"I bet you're both tired. If you want, you can rest a bit on the couch and you, Jane, can take my bed upstairs. Terry is still sleeping in her room and she usually wakes up at six, but I'm going to start preparing for breakfast for..."

"I will help you cook. I've been learning." El said walking into the kitchen and grabbed an apron. She was far too excited to go back to sleep. She had barely gotten sleep to begin with. Becky looked at Hopper who was already getting settled on the couch.

"Alright, I've got everything to make some waffles I heard they were a favorite of yours."

"You mean eggos?"

"Well, eggos are a type of waffle, but I wanted to make you homemade waffles. It's the same recipe our mom made for Terry and I. I would like to say it's a family recipe, but who knows where our mom dug it up..

"Mama's Mama?"

"Ya, your grandmother. She and your grandpa passed away when Terry and I were in college. Freak car accident."

"Gone?"

"Well, yes. But we liked to believed that even though they weren't physically here with us, that they were with us because we carried them in our hearts so they would never be truly gone."

"Hearts?" El knew what a heart was. The organ that makes the rhythmic noise in our chests, but how could you carry someone in it. Becky stopped measuring flour and crouched down until they were eye level.

"Yeah." She pointed a flour covered finger towards El's heart. "This thing does more than just pump blood, you know. It's a special place we can carry those we love. This place makes a noise as long as humans have been on this planet which makes it pretty special. You've heard it before, right?" El nodded.

"Well, all of us have a similar beat right? Ba bump.. Ba bump... Our mom would say that when you loved someone, their heartbeats would align with your own. Meaning the beats would beat together. This was how you carried them there and could carry them with you always." Becky put her other flour covered hand on her chest where it would leave a white hand print.

"See, whenever you wanted to feel close to them, all you had to do is listen to your own heartbeat and know that their heart would sound exactly the same. Even when they no longer had a heart to beat, you

can always listen to yours and remember." Becky smiled at El's reaction to her words. She looked mesmerized.

"This is, i guess you could say, a family tradition we have."

"Tradition?" Becky slowly brought her finger up to El's face just an inch from touching her nose.

"It's a belief we have in our family and we pass it on to the next generation which is you." Becky touched El's nose playfully, leaving a distinct white mark. El was taken aback and turned to look at herself in the reflection of the microwave and started to laugh.

They went back to making waffles, but as El looked over to see the white handprint over Aunt Becky's chest; over her heart.. El felt... peaceful? She overflowed with happiness at being included in a family, of hearing about her grandparents, and knowing that she could keep those she loved with her no matter what. She could rest a bit easier knowing that when someone you loved was gone, they weren't really gone. They were still in your heartbeats.

They brought Mama down from her room after the waffles were ready. Aunt Becky also had prepared some eggs, sausage, and hashbrowns. Apparently, they didn't eat like this often, but it was a thanksgiving.. tradition. It was the day for eating. Mama ate with help from Aunt Becky and when El asked why Mama was so silent, she said that that was normal. "Sometimes she has more energy and can feed herself and talk and other times she seems to need more help. When breakfast was done and El felt like she was going to pop from eating 4 waffles (yes, Hopper and Aunt Becky told her to stop, but did she listen?.. Of course not.. El wasn't ready to say that something tasted better than eggos, but these came the closest for sure), she helped Mama into her rocking chair.

"She must be feeling really weak today. She usually doesn't need this much help walking." Becky started to look a little concerned. El was also concerned. If Mama was having trouble walking, she might not have the energy to 'talk' with El in the void and El had been looking forward to seeing her thoughts, even if there were on repeat. It made El feel closer to her.

"Mama? It's me, Jane. I know you are tired today so I won't bother you, but I want you to know that..." The T.V channels started turning until it reached the static. El looked at her Mama whose nose was starting to bleed. Becky gasped and Hopper looked confused.

"I'll get the towel.."

"No." El immediately sat down and got comfortable. "I don't need it." And with that El took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She reached and found Mama in the void. It was clearer than it had been the last time. Mama was still silent though. As El approached her, she reached out her hand to touch her. When she got close enough, Mama's head whipped to look at El and her hand shot out and grabbed El's wrist.

"Jane.." Mama said and plunged El into another vision.. a different vision. There was a pregnant woman rubbing her belly lovingly and as the women turned around she saw a young Mama talking to a man in a white coat.

"I want to name her Jane." Terry said smiling up at the man who El couldn't see the face of. He was tall like Hopper, but skinny and had glasses on.

"As in Jane Porter from Tarzan of the Apes? You always loved that story." He leaned over to look down a hallway El couldn't see. When the coast was clean he leaned down and brushed his lips to Terry's and gently put his hand on her swollen middle.

"I think Jane is a lovely name." He whispered and they shared a look. At least El thought they did, she still couldn't make out his face.

"I have everything ready to go. When Brenner leaves for his conference in London.." They went quiet as they heard something, but El couldn't hear anything and then everything went black. El got scared as she wandered around in the darkness.

"Mama!.. Mama!" Then El heard it.. a soft voice singing.

"Hush little baby, don't say a word. Mama's gonna buy you a mockingbird.." The voice sounded like it was in pain. El heard a sob

and saw her young Mama sitting on the floor rocking back and forth holding her belly with both hands. Her shoulders were shaking and a familiar voice cut through the room. A room El now recognized as being just like her room at the Hawkins Lab.

"I didn't want to kill him, but you left me no choice my dear. He was one of my best and brightest too. Needless to say, you won't be catching that train to Florida. Also any further attempts to leave should be absolved if you don't wish for anyone else to get hurt." It was Papa. Mama's crying increased at his words. The despair and hopelessness coming from Mama made El choke on her own sobbing. Papa got closer and leaned down so he could quietly say something. El had to move closer to hear.

".. so even if you did escape, i would find you. I would find you and that child you carry. Know that there is nothing I will not do; no foul play I won't stoop to in order to get you both back. When I want something I get it. It's very simple. And there is nothing that will stop me. Nothing that *can* stop me. Do you understand?" Papa's voice was soft, but it held a deadly edge that made El tremble in terror.

"Jane.." El fell once again into darkness, but this time the darkness was shaking. Was there an earthquake in the void?

"Jane!" El recognized it as Aunt Becky who sounded upset. Suddenly, El opened her eyes and gasped. She saw a shaken Aunt Becky and a very worried Hopper.

"I'm okay. Mama.."

"What the hell happened? You started crying and your skin went white.. " El put one arm around Hopper and one around Aunt Becky. The had both been kneeling over her so it wasn't so awkward. Aunt Becky seemed to be in shock.

"I'm fine. Mama showed me a vision. Papa was in it.. I got scared, but I'm okay." El knew that telling them all the details would worry them and she still wasn't sure what Mama was trying to tell her.

It took El a good while to finally convince them that she was fine. Hopper still believed that there was more to what El was saying, but

he would be patient and let her come to him. At least her hoped he would. Patience was not one of his virtues.

They spent the rest of thanksgiving in relative normalcy. El helped with getting the turkey ready and once it was in the oven she tried on the clothes Aunt Becky bought her. One was a dress, because even if no else sees it, it's always nice for a lady to feel like a lady. Another was a set of high waisted jeans and a one shoulder top that had a tank underneath. Aunt Becky said that was the style now, thanks to the movie 16 Candles. She said that this outfit was similar to what Molly Ringwald wore in the movie. Neither Hopper and El knew who that was, but El didn't care. The clothes were pretty and she couldn't wait to wear it on Saturday when she saw her friends especially Mike.

As midnight approached Hopper had one last thing to talk about..

"Our goal is for El to attend school and have a normal life. However, with a name like Eleven, that might be a little hard. Not because it's a strange name, but it allows the Hawkins lab to make a connection to her. So I wanted to be on the same page with both of you, in making El's name be Jane Eleanor. It would make it easier if anyone of us who've known her as El slipped up, but let her keep a name given to her by Terry. What do you both think?" El was smiling, but Becky look confused.

"Is her last name going to be Eleanor? I mean, the story you would have to tell people would have to connect her to you somehow.."

"Jane Eleanor Hopper." El said. She didn't want to give up being called El, since it was the name Mike gave her and she didn't want to give up being called Jane, since that was name Mama gave her. Adding Hopper to her name, was the only part El wasn't sure how Hopper would react to. It felt right, though, and she was very much hoping he wouldn't think otherwise. El hesitantly glanced at Hopper to see his reaction. He had a warm smile on his face. He was clearly touched.

"Jane Eleanor Hopper, it is."

Author's note: So.. I got carried away again. It's just so much fun! I

usually try to post my chapters by the latest Sunday, but I got distracted by the Oscars. Once again, thank you to my reviewers: Rhaella Tully for catching my subtle/not so subtle El foreshadowing, Alba Zoel te amo y gracias, disneyprincess315, and That Aussie Fangirl. I'm so glad you guys like it. I hope you guys enjoy this chapter as well. Last thing, I will be stopping this story at 6 chapters and will be moving on to my next story which will cover from the snowball to when they start freshman year. Title is still in progress.

5. Chapter 5

Chapter: 5

Authors Note: Alright, you all need to be very proud of me. I ran the Rock 'N' Roll DC ½ Marathon on Saturday so the fact that this chapter still got posted within the week (okay I'm a day late.. stop nitpicking) is quite the accomplishment. *Pats self on the back*. But in all seriousness, the real reason this got posted in time is because I have been itching to write this part since the moment I decided to write this story. I really hope you all enjoy it.

Leaving Mama and Aunt Becky's house was harder than El expected. She really liked Aunt Becky and the stories she told about Mama and her growing up. *Oh Mama...*

What did it mean? Who was that man? and why did Mama show him to me?.. also how did Mama do it? Aunt Becky had said that Mama rarely says different words from her dream circle, but this time she had clearly strayed from the norm. Aunt Becky was almost in tears, hoping that Terry was getting better and that she would once again have her sister back. El had tried to contact Mama later, but Mama had seemed ... tired?.. Had Mama saved her energy just to show El that? But why? What was so important? And why show her Papa? *Too many questions.*

El couldn't wait to see her friends. They would know what it all meant. *Mike will know, he is really good at connecting the dots.. He's so smart and com.. competent.*

It was the night of Day 19 and Hopper was going over the schedule for tomorrow.. again. Since he wasn't going to be able to stay for most of the day, he wanted to make sure they had a good plan in place.

"5:00 am, arrive at the Byers house, double check all exists and secure the property. I'll do a drive around the block just in case. Breakfast can happen sometime after we have confirmation that the grounds are secure.

8:00 am, hit the books. Your friends are allowed to enter the premises after 8. Anyone arriving early will get an earful. Joyce will have the subjects and materials laid out for you.

10:00 am, I leave for work and if anything happens Joyce calls my direct line. All you have to do is let her know if you feel any..

El had gotten up and started to awkwardly pat Hopper's back. "Breath," she said while trying not to smile.

"Noon, you and your friends get to watch a movie or play that D&D crap.. But those kids better be gone by 6, alright. I don't think their parents have forgiven me and Joyce about the last time you all were at the Byers, especially the Mayfields. I will be back by 7 tops. We will wait it out until midnight and then make our escape." Hopper sighed and gave El a serious look.

"Don't stay up too late visiting the Wheeler kid. I mean your going to see him in less than 12 hours.. " El's face looked like it would crack in half from how wide her smile got. Hopper signed and shook his head while heading to bed.

El ran into her room and threw herself on her bed. She let out a squeak which was muffled by her pillow. She had barely closed her eyes when she heard Mike's voice and saw him in the void. Each time she visited, things were clearer. She could see a little more of the background around him. He usually sat in the fort when he talked to her, but this time he was up and pacing. She could see the gaming table with lots of papers on it.

"It's day 19! El, It's. Day. 19. I'm leaving my house at exactly 7:30 and I'm meeting Dustin and Lucas at Max's place, she lives the closest to Will, and then we head on over. I've got a lot of science books I asked Mr. Clark for. I mean, I'm going to bring over stuff from my other classes too, but I want you to know about the really fun stuff. I mean we are all really good at science but I always score the highest on our tests." Mike had to stop to take a breath. He'd been talking really fast out of excitement and El was following along, just as excited to hear it.

"Also, I've got your character made, that is if you wanted to play

D&D.. oh ya!" Mike picked up something small from the table. El walked over to get a closer look. It was a little metal girl in a dress. "It's not painted yet and the game store in Hawkins doesn't have the best selection, but I found you a female mage miniature! She's also got short hair, like yours..." El looked at the little metal girl and noticed that she also had a very large chest, unlike El's. El looked down at her little chest and frowned. She supposed this was a woman figurine not a girl figurine.

"I'll see if I can find some paints, I'm sure Will might have something.." Mike finally flung himself on the couch with a big flop. "Dustin's birthday is on Sunday and he was too shy to ask if we could make tomorrow a birthday party. I told Mrs. Byers and she's got a cake for him and there is just a lot of exciting things happening and ..I need to stop talking so fast, huh?" Mike's smile was vibrant that El couldn't help but get a closer look. El knelt next to the couch which put them on the same level and she watched his face change as he would think of something to say and then just smiled and shake his head.

"Alright, I guess I should go to sleep. Sleeping is suppose to make time go faster. At least that's what my mom says." Mike sighed and his face changed. It look like he was trying to decide on something. Then he suddenly sat up and tentatively reached out his hand. El had been kneeling by his face so his hand went out into empty space. He spread his fingers and wiggled them a little. Then it clicked. Surprised, El had never known Mike to initiated or asked her to use her powers during her visits, but she was immediately on her feet and in front of Mike, smiling at the uncertain look on his face.

El concentrated and felt herself slip into her powers. Each time it got smoother. Like a path through tall grass becoming more pronounced each time she walked down it. Even though it had been awhile since she tried to touch him last, she could still tell it was easier. When she did this, the drain on her energy was too noticeable and she didn't want Hopper to worry. However, she couldn't resist Mike so she reached her hand out and touched his fingers. Mike let out a small laugh.

"I still can't believe.. I mean how.. It's just.." Mike, currently, didn't have the ability of forming a sentence so he just shut up. He could

feel her fingers touching his and when he spread his fingers to interlock them with hers he realized he could make out the shape of her hand. If he hadn't been looking so intently, he would have missed it. It looked like how heat distorted the air, similar to the heat coming off a barbecued. It was invisible, but you could make out where her hand began and ended.

"Your hand is cold." Mike said and then felt her hand squeeze his and he squeezed hers back. It was incredible. Simply amazing and then just like the last time, it disappeared.

El hadn't pushed herself hard because she knew she was going to see him tomorrow and so tried to go sleep. As she laid down, there was something bothering her. That feeling had come back. It was so unfamiliar that she still couldn't figure what was wrong. She tried to concentrate on it and started to get dizzy. The room started spinning so she closed her eyes and when she opened them she was no longer in her room. It was dark because the lights were off, but as her eyes adjusted she could make out a desk and a bed. Then she saw Mike. He was sleeping in his bed and the moon was bright enough that it cast him in a pale shadow. Wait, what time was it? Didn't she just see Mike? How long had she been spinning?

El took a moment to admire him. He looked so handsome with his disheveled hair and his mouth open. Was she dreaming? She was enjoying seeing Mike this way, just like when she saw him brushing his teeth. It felt like a personal moment which meant El probably shouldn't be watching. Then again, this might have just been a dream, right? Was it so bad to dream about Mike? Suddenly, Mike's face got closer.. or did El get nearer? El could see the fine lines of his lips. His bottom lip was slightly chapped and there was a little drool mark on the left side. El's vision blurred as she focused in on Mike's lips. Then El felt her powers move his lips further apart, exposing Mike's teeth and .. tongue?.. *Wait, what am I doing?* El had a hard time thinking straight. Something was wrong, very wrong. This wasn't a dream and it didn't make sense for her to be here. Shaken, El tried to force herself to wake up, but nothing happened. El was about to start panicking when she finally felt the 'dream-not-dream' fading away. Gradually, she returned to herself and sat up in her bed at the safehouse. She was breathing hard and could feel her heart going

crazy. What was that? El knew she had discovered something very important.. Something not right...*Need to tell Hopper, but .. I'm so tired.*.. El would have to come back to whatever just happened, because she could already feel herself falling to her pillow. All she wanted was sleep... and then El was out. When she woke the next morning she forgot all about her weird 'dream.'

Day 20 - 5:00 am.

El and Hopper stood on the Byer's porch waiting for Joyce to open the door. Hopper checked his watch again. *What was taking Joyce so long?*

"Maybe knock louder?" El said. She had to wear a baggy coat and Hoppers old snow hat so it would cover most of her face and it was itchy.

"I don't want to wake up the kids..." the door swung open with both Joyce and Will in the doorway.

"Sorry sorry. Someone wanted to be awake when you guys got here, but had a hard time waking up.." Joyce smiled at Will who looked a little embarrassed. Will was smiling and was about to step aside so they could get out of the cold when El gave him a hug.

"C'mon, El. It's freezing out here. Hey Joyce, did you put in the new locks we talked about.." Hopper went around the hugging kids and Joyce rolled her eyes and followed him to show him the ridiculous locks.

When they were alone, El released Will slowly out of the hug. Her smile was gradually fading as she held onto his right arm confused. Will was blushing and looked at El, wondering why she was still holding his arm. Her face was also very close and Will couldn't help notice that El was actually.. pretty. Her hair was curly now that she didn't have gel in it and without makeup she looked less intimidating. Her eyes were a pretty light brown and intense and ...haunted?

"Will.." El whispered and it was Will's turn to look confused. Then El's hand slowly went from his elbow to his wrist where she gently tugged it forward, never once breaking eye contact. She lifted the

sleeve and Will immediately jumped back and pulled the sleeve down. He retreated into the house, stunned.

"How did you.. Um.. It's nothing.. I just.. um..." Will stammered. His mom still hadn't seen it and he wanted to keep it that way for now. El followed Will into the house and closed the door with her hands. Will looked around for away to escape when El grabbed his other arm.

"Will.. I understand.." She pulled him closer so she could look him in the eyes. She was talking softly so that Hopper and Joyce wouldn't hear. "I won't tell.. I'm your friend.. you can trust me.." El's eyes never wavered and Will felt himself starting to relax. *So this is what Mike meant.* It really felt like El *did* understand. Her eyes.. they understood the bad things because she had been through them as well.

Will relaxed and nodded. He felt a burden lift from his shoulders at someone else knowing. At someone else understanding. But, how much did she know? And how had she found out just by touching his arm? I mean he wasn't even sure what was happening to him.

"El, if you don't mind me asking, How did you know about it? It only just happened a few nights ago and I'm still trying to figure out a way to tell the party... I know I need to tell them and my mom too, but .. I just .." Will wasn't sure what he was trying to say. He was still reeling from being found out. El looked away and was quiet.

"I see him too. The big shadow monster." El whispered and she looked like she was far away. Suddenly, she looked up. "They're coming back... talk about this later? Promise?" El still hadn't let go of Will's arm and she was leaning very close again. Will nodded his head and she smiled and let go of his arm. She stood up and went to the table. Will took a deep breath and leaned back. All this touching from a pretty girl was making him agree to anything she said. Wait.. he was sitting on the couch? He didn't remember making his way from the door. Great, he really was going crazy.

"How to kill a.. Mockingbird?" Will got up just as the grown ups came in the kitchen door. Hopper looked unsatisfied and Joyce looked exasperated.

"Really Hop, don't you think you're being just a bit paranoid. She's

going to be fine." Joyce turned to El and gestured toward the kitchen.

"C'mon sweetheart, I have eggos, yes, only two eggos, I know, I know." Joyce snickered at Hopper's face. El had followed Joyce into the kitchen, fully enjoying their interaction. It was good to see someone keeping Hopper on his toes.

"I'm going to double check the perimeter and then take a drive through the neighboring streets." Hopper said heading towards the door. Everyone watched him leave.

"I know it's a bit early for breakfast, but I figure since we are all up we could get breakfast out of the way and start on your studies earlier. Plus Hop is a bit tense so maybe it will calm him down." Joyce said. El nodded went to help Will bring out the syrup and butter. Joyce smiled at the two, they both seemed to be content with the quiet which was so different from other kids their age. Her smile faded, she supposed the reason for that was because they had both dealt with things no one their age should ever be exposed to.

When Hopper came back they sat down to eat and chat about all the things Hopper had done around the property to ensure everyone would be safe. El kept looking at the clock. 7:45. Will noticed her distraction and smiled. Hopper on the other hand looked annoyed.

"Hey, calm down. It's not like looking at the clock will make the minute hand go faster."

"It will if I move it." El said offhandedly then she sat up straight realizing she said that aloud. Hopper's face was apologetic and both Joyce and Will started to chuckle.

"Oh c'mon Hop. Relax, this day is supposed to be a treat for El and your going to ruin it if you can't take a little joke." Hopper crossed his arms in irritation. Joyce winked at El who sighed in relief.

"Sorry." El said sheepishly. She was so glad that both Joyce and Will thought it was funny. Had they not been here El would be in a lot of trouble.

"Can you find them?" Will asked and instantly backtracked. "I'm

sorry, you don't have to.." before he could finish El closed her eyes and smiled.

"I see them" She was so excited and she wondered why hadn't she thought to do this sooner. Joyce and Will found themselves leaning forward, her excitement was infectious.

"Where are they?" Will asked. Joyce glanced at Will with an unreadable look that only Hopper caught.

"Not sure.." El frowned and then her head lowered and the energy around her grew slightly heavier. El gasped. "Gas station."

"That's close! I think they should be here in about 5 minutes. Hey, El. You wanna do something fun?" Will gave El a devious look and stood up. El quickly got up to follow. Joyce was so surprised, it always took Will awhile to warm up to people. He was always a shy kid and after the past years events that had only gotten worse. So it was really nice to see him like this.

"How's he doing?" Hopper asked. Joyce looked over at Hopper as her face took on a tired look.

"He says he's doing fine, but every now and then I catch him zoning out. When he does, he has this look. I'm not sure how to explain it, but it looks as though he's carrying the weight of the world and he won't or he can't share it with anyone else. Honestly, seeing him with El is the first time I've seen him acting like a kid again." Joyce smiled at Hopper. They stared at each other not saying anything. They had been friends a long time that words weren't always needed.

"You should stand here." Will said and took El by the shoulders, his cheeks reddening, again. *Stop or she going to think your sick or something.* "We do this when we want to scare the person walking through the door."

"Scare them?" Will nodded and smiled.

"Like a surprise. From this position, you have the upper hand when they walk through the door. It's like a funny scare." The more El thought about it the more she liked this plan.

"Where will you stand? Will you funny scare them too?"

"No, I'll distract them. Oh! There's Mike. Wow, he must have been riding fast. Okay, when he comes in stay there and sneak up on him from behind. Ready?" El nodded her excitement rising. Mike was here! She's going to see him .. well .. see him not in the void. And she was going to funny scare him.

Will was having fun and he hadn't had real fun in a long time. With his friends, he couldn't be the same person he was before all the bad things happen, but with a El, she wouldn't look at him weird, because in a way she was weirder. He was smiling as Mike climbed the stairs. They could hear his footsteps approaching the door and then his knock.

"Come in!" Will said trying to get rid of the smile on his face. Mike walked in breathing heavily and gave Will a half hearted wave. He looked at Will who waved back and then looked around. He saw a glowering Hopper and a smiling Joyce at the table. Where was she? Had Hopper lied?

Once Mike had entered the house, El's heart started beating so loud that it was all she could do just to smile at the back of his jacket. Everyone but Mike, saw El expression while looking at Mike. It was pure bliss and it made Joyce smile, Hopper scowl, and Will confused.

"Where.." Mike didn't get to finish his sentence as a small body smacked into him from behind arms wrapping around his waist in a tight embrace. Once again, Joyce, Hopper, and Will saw Mike's expression when he realized that El was behind him. He couldn't contain his happiness as he grabbed her arms to pull her in front of him so he could give her a full body bear hug. El was more than happy to accommodate him. He smelled so.. good.. like the fresh air from outside mixed with the smell of sweaty Mike. El closed her eyes to commit it to memory for the rest of the month without him. She sighed. She really was a freak.

They pulled apart when they heard the rest of the kids riding up to the house. Mike hadn't closed the door so they heard Dustin's grumbling from inside. "Geez Mike, where is the fire? I mean where is she gonna go. Hopper's got her on house arrest, just with a

different house..oh shit!"

"Oh shit' is right Henderson, now get your ass in here!" Hopper was standing at the door and closed it shut when everyone had scrambled inside.

"Alright, I didn't feel like this had to be said, but apparently it does. First rule: No talking about El outside of the house." Hopper gave Dustin a look to which Dustin audibly gulped. "To add to that, once we figure all this shit out, El's full name to the public will be Jane Eleanor Hopper. So whether you call her El or Jane it won't matter. El will explain the reason for that later, but for the time being, keep your mouths closed. Got it. Good. Second rule: Stay inside the house. As Henderson conveniently pointed out, you are all now under house arrest and are only allowed to leave at six pm sharp. Third rule: you are here to help El catch up so she can attend school with you birdbrains as soon as possible. It is currently 7:55 so you are all 5 mins early.."

"Which means we get to start on El's studies that much earlier. But it might be a good idea to start at 8 on the dot next month for Hoppers sanity." Joyce said, interrupting Hopper and herding the kids toward the table. She was probably the only person who could get away with that.

"So I was thinking we could start with Math.." And for the next two hours, Joyce and Hopper sat at the table with the kids going over the different levels of education they were in. In math it turns out that Wheeler and Henderson were already learning Geometry while everyone else was in Algebra. El was just getting into Pre-Algebra. Everyone was in the same Science Class with Mr. Clark, and their English and Social Sciences were basically all the same as well. It was no surprise that they were all leaps and bounds ahead of El and she was trying not to let her anxiety show. Mike, who had been stealing looks at her the whole time, caught everything.

"Hey.." Mike said and put his hand on her shoulder. "This is a good thing. I mean, now Hopper has to keep us around every month, so we can keep you on track." Mike gave El as cooked smile and she gave a small smile back. It was hard to realize she still had a long way to go, especially after working so hard. When Hopper got up from the table

to put on his coat, he leaned down so he was face to face with El.

"Mike is right. It's not a bad thing to be behind and in reality you are learning what took these guys years to learn in months. So honestly, I see you passing these losers once you get the hang of it."

"Hey! We are lovers not losers, thank you.. Um.. Chief.. Sir.." Dustin slowly started to slide down his chair as Hopper stood up.

"See you no later than 7 and that's Sir Chief Hopper to you Henderson." El smiled and realized that she was the only one who caught that Hopper was joking. Hopper thanked Joyce one more time before leaving and closing the door.

"Oh thank god! I thought he would never leave. Jeez, El how do you live with that every day?" Dustin was out of his chair. "Mike of course got his hug, but what are we.. chopped liver?" El got up and there was hugging and hand shaking which Max once again tried not to let bother her.

"You have curly hair." Mike's hand went to touch her hair to see if it was as soft as they looked. El's smile grew and she gave her head a shake so her curls bounced around his fingers. Mike chuckled and the rest of the party looked as if they didn't recognize him. Max whispered, "did Mike just .. laugh?" to Lucas who nodded while still looked creeped out.

"Mrs. Byers, we know you have a lot scheduled for us today, but I was hoping to show El some of the ideas we have for our science projects this year. If there was some time.."

"Say no more Mike, El has actually been a bit ahead of schedule this week. I wasn't exaggerating when I said she'd been working really hard. All she has left is her English. Today was suppose to be more about finding where El is in comparison to you guys. Once she's done with her English homework the rest of the time is for fun. So go and talk about your project. I have to make an important phone call in the room, but let me know if you guys need me."

"Thanks Mrs. Byers." As Joyce left, Mike finally felt the eyes of everyone on him.

"What?" Mike said exasperated.

"Oh nothing.. You just seem .." Dustin hedged.

"Less.. Oh, I don't know.." Lucas tried.

"You aren't being a jerk. Are you feeling okay?" Max said bluntly and both Dustin and Lucas laughed while Mike scowled.

"What we mean to say is, that it's nice having the old Mike back." Will said patting Mike on the arm.

El looked at Mike who was blushing and then at everyone else, clearly confused.

"Mike is not a jerk." El said and eyed Max, who immediately ducked down with an 'oh shit' face and Mike finally took pity on them.

"Alright, I've been a little grumpy this last year and now I'm not. Are we done with this? Great. Now El has to finish her English so are we going to keep looking at my pretty face or are we going to help her."

"And he's back." Lucas said as Mike leaned over to grab El's homework. "So what are you reading?"

"Anne of Avonlea," El said. She wasn't sure if she wanted everyone to know how behind she was in English. Dustin grabbed the book and looked it over

"You have to write a summary of chapters 1-3?" Dustin said looking at the old book.

"Are you enjoying it?" asked Will.

"It's okay. They talk funny." El said with a shrug and looked down at the blank paper. She didn't want to show them how awful her handwriting was. She'd seen Will's when he pulled out his notebook. She'd also watched how fast they wrote down things. She was too embarrassed to do her homework in front of them. They'd already seen some of her hand writing and she'd seen the surprise in Lucas and Dustin's faces.

"Do you wanna read outloud to us?" Lucas said. "It's always fun to get a take on the book when you read aloud and we can enjoy the book with you." El's eyes widened and she vigorously shook her head. It was the thing she struggled with the most. If she had time to focus with no distractions she could finish her English homework in 2 hours, but she didn't want them to notice how often she didn't turn the page and the worry would mess up her concentration. She just couldn't do it.

"I want to do my English later. It will be easier to concentrate. What ideas do you have for your science project?" Her change of topic was as subtle as a hammer and everyone wasn't sure if they should continue trying to help her with her English or not. El looked over and saw Mike looking at her with an intense expression. Usually she could read Mike's expressions, but this time she had no clue. Suddenly, Mike got up and went to knock on Mrs. Byer's door. El watched as Mike entered Mrs. Byer's room and closed the door.

"What was that about?" Dustin said looking at Will, who just shrugged and looked at El who wasn't sure if Mike was mad at her for not wanting to do her English. Was he telling Mrs. Byer's? No, Mike would do that. But, he was a very good student. She had smiled seeing the comparison between him and the others. He was right when he said that he got the highest scores on his test, but he didn't always do his homework so he can't be that angry.

"Don't worry, Mike's always a couple steps ahead, but he always comes back to explain, either that or we usually figure it out soon enough. You want to take a break?" Will could see El's panic, they all could. "How does some lunch sound? We could make sandwiches." Will smiled and El felt herself try to smile back.

"Yes! Food. Good call Will, I'm starving.."

"When are you not starving?" Lucas said smirking.

"When he's watching a Demogorgon eat his cat." Max added.

"Wow, Max way too soon. Let me heal a bit before you start poking that wound.."

"Oh. My bad. Still learning the dynamics. I got you a pretty awesome present so maybe that will make up for my poking at your softspots."

"Really! Where is it? Where's my present? Did you all get me gifts. Awe, guys .. I'm like soo.. soo touched right now... Oh my god.."
Dustin's 'Valley Girl' accent never failed to lighten up the mood. Max and Lucas grabbed out their gifts and Will went to grab his. El finally stopped waiting for Mike and realized she hadn't brought a present. She vaguely remembered presents exchanged on a T.V show once.

"Present?," El said horror at not getting Dustin a present as well. Mike had even told her they would be celebrating today. *What am I going to do?*

"No El. Don't worry about it. You are exempt from present giving. I mean you have to put up with Hopper so that should be like a present to the whole of Hawkins every day." Everyone was smiling and El felt herself calm a bit.

"He's not that bad.." before El could finish Mike came out of the room with a big blanket. Joyce followed him out with a soft smile. Mike didn't say anything and everyone was quiet waiting for him speak. He started putting on his jacket he looked at Wills hat and then at Will. Will nodded and Mike grabbed the hat. He then grabbed El's coat, hat and scarf then started toward El who stood up and started to put everything on. She could tell Mike wasn't upset, just very focused. Once she was dressed he grabbed Anne of Avonlea and headed toward the back door.

"I gave Mike my permission to take you outside, but just between the shed and the house. Where I can keep an eye on you, but still give you a little privacy. If Hop gives us hell over it then so be it. Now ..did someone say sandwiches?" Joyce said as Mike pulled open the door and waited for El to follow. Still no one said anything until the door was closed.

"Wow, Mrs. Byers you live on the dangerous side of life." Dustin said in awe and fear. "I just want to make sure that you know .. um Mike and El.."
Dustin made the 'it's like a compound' gesture and Joyce smiled.

"Yes Dustin, I know Hop is going to come after me when he hears about this, but Mike made a very good point, one I can't tell you about, but just know there is a good reason for it. Also Hop needs to calm down. He's always gone overboard with the protector role even when we were in high school and it's irritating. " Will looked over at his mom, his eyebrow raised. "Alright, so I might do that too, but I'm getting better about it right?" Joyce pulled out the bread and started preparing lunch.

"Um, Mrs. Byer's.. I mean we can totally trust Mike, but .. I mean you know.. He and El.. that they.." Lucas wacked Dustin on the arm and Will looked over at Dustin confused. Mrs. Byer's just laughed.

"Yes Dustin, I got it the first time. I think everyone can see that those two adore each other which by the way I love watching Hopper squirm over, but I think Mike's heart is in the right place with his plan to help El with her English homework and honestly, I think it's a brilliant idea. Now, I told him he has an hour to help her and then they have to come inside, plus it's too cold for them to even think about getting into that sort of trouble." Mrs. Byer's chuckled as the Dustin and Lucas shared a skeptical look. Only Max caught Will expression of dismay.

"Hey you okay?" Max whispered to Will. Will looked at his mom, making sure she didn't hear Max ask him that questions. Max gave him a, 'I'm not an idiot' look. Will gave a weak smile.

"I'm alright. I just didn't know that El and Mike were so close. I guess everyone forgets that I only just met El a couple weeks ago."

"Hey me too, but I got to see Mike go super paranoid when she had to close the gate, so I kind of knew, that and the way they look at each other, I mean .. get a room right? Still, it's kind of weird. El is so cool and Mike is so.. cranky. You know?" Max was trying to cheer him up and Will was grateful that Max had joined their party. It made sense, he had always wondered what made Mike change so drastically last year. Honestly, Will thought it was because of him, now he knew it was actually El. He really should have figured it out all those times he talked about her, Will had just missed all the hints, which was very unlike him. That's why he was feeling down, he hadn't paid as much attention to his friend feelings like he should have. Yeah, that's

why.

Outside the air was chilly, but bearable. So when Mike laid the blanket down and gestured for her to sit down she followed, still thoroughly confused. Mike looked up at the sky which was quite nice. Lots of clouds, but not over cast. Mike smiled and sat down next to El. Then laid down and patted the blanket. El was shocked, but immediately laid down next to him on her side while he was on his back looking at the clouds. *How had he gotten Joyce to agree to them laying down together outside, alone?* Abruptly, Mike turned to face her.

"El, I wanna tell you a story about a boy who sucked at anything that had to do with reading. It will be a super lame story and you will not be allowed to laugh or mention it to anyone else. Promise?" Mike's face was close, El felt herself blush. She had, of course, been closer to his face in the void, but seeing him look at her while being this close was a bit nerve wracking.

"Promise. Is the boy's name Michael Wheeler? Mike for short?" El grinned and picked up a leaf that had landed on their blanket.

"Why yes, this boys name is Mike Wheeler. However did you guess?" Mike said playfully and then his his expression turned serious. "When I was in the 3rd grade, I struggled a lot with reading and. in school, when you suck at reading you suck at almost everything else. I tried really hard to make up where I could, but if you can't understand what your reading and are too shy to ask for help.. well .. you're sunk. My dad, well, he couldn't understand why I was doing so poorly so he tried to tutor me the way his dad tutored him which was with a belt."

"Belt? He gave you a belt?" El asked.

"No, well yes in a way. He would hit me with his belt when I did poorly on my tests. His reasoning was that next time I would make sure to try harder or I would get the belt again." El gasped and grabbed Mike's hand. Mike's papa was a bad papa too? El's eyes turned fierce and the leaf she had a second ago vaporized into thin air. Mike saw the ashes float up and quickly grabbed her hand. *Woah, was was that?* Mike made a mental note to ask her about that later. *Were El's eyes darker or was that was just the clouds passing over?*

"Your Papa hurt you too?" El asked her voice low and menacing.

"Only with his belt, wait .. Did that scientist guy.. did he hurt you? But why would .. "

"I couldn't always move things with my mind, at first I could only find people. If I couldn't do what they wanted or was too tired they would hurt me with the shocker or give me the needle. The needle was always worse than the shockers." El shivered at the memory.

"They would hurt you for being too tired to use your powers? And they would stick you with needles?" Now Mike was furious. He'd really had no idea what she's gone through in that place. He squeezed El's hand and she looked over at him. They understood the betrayal one felt when someone you loved, would treat you so poorly.

"Yes, but they stopped hurting me after I hurt them. I didn't mean to hurt them.. I just didn't want to be locked up again..." El's haunted look came back. "But you don't have powers. How did you stop your bad papa?"

"It was my mom. After a month or so of my dad's method, my mom couldn't take it anymore and took over my tutoring. Let's just say that the belt method wasn't working. One day my mom took me outside and made me look at the clouds. She told me that we were going to sit here as long as it took for me to feel comfortable with the words I was reading. I was going to read aloud and if there was a word I couldn't understand or if I had a question, that we were going to stop and look at the clouds while we discussed what was going on in the book or she would explain the word and ask me to use it in a sentence... stuff like that. I mean we don't have to do it exactly how me and my mom did it.. We will be doing our own version of it." Mike was uncomfortable talking about this. It was a time in his life that the party didn't really know about. I mean, Lucas and Will sort of knew he had struggled, but they didn't know about his dad.

"The point of it all, was to stop being nervous about appearing stupid and just ask for the help you needed. That day, it took me a good hour to get through the first chapter. I hated to read aloud. If the teacher called on me to read aloud I would pretend that I was sick, had to use the bathroom, or any number of excuses just so my

classmates wouldn't hear how stupid I sounded." Mike touched El's face. His fingers were cold, but gentle and took her by surprise.

"When Lucas suggested you read aloud, I saw the panic on your face and knew you probably struggled like I had. So I asked Mrs. Byers if I could do for you what my mom did for me." Mike grabbed the book and gave it to El then turned onto his back.

"While you read aloud, pause and ask me as many questions as you need. I'm here to be your dictionary and encyclopedia until you feel more comfortable around the words that you read. Until you don't feel ashamed, because you are not stupid, El. I mean people are literally killing each other for that head of yours. Sorry, that's super morbid. What I'm saying is that your perfect, okay? You are perfect." Mike realized that he might be going a little overboard. He also never actually asked El if she would like him to help her. He looked at El and prayed he hadn't over stepped or assumed incorrectly. What Mike saw made him pause. El's eyes were bright with unshed tears and she quickly looked away up to the clouds and sniffed.

"Thank you, Mike." El couldn't believe how lucky she was. She had always known Mike was special, but he was so much more than that. El put her hand to her chest. *This must be what Aunt Becky meant when she talked about heartbeats. I can feel Mike. He's there. He is in my heartbeats.* When she thought of Mike, her heartbeats were loud and powerful. She took a deep breath realizing that they were out here to work and she couldn't let Mike down. "Thank you for sharing that story with me. I will read and ask you questions. I've never felt afraid to ask you questions." El smiled up at the clouds and opened the book. "Chapter 1: An I-irate Neighbor. Irate?"

"Eye-rate. It means very angry." Mike said patiently and smiled. This felt good. It felt right. Just the two of them looking at the clouds and talking about the world that El had yet to experience. Mike liked to be there for El. Always. So finding this way to be there for her, made Mike ecstatic. By the time they were done with chapters one through three, El had a lot of words she could now practice and Mike was happy to see El's improvement in such a short time.

"Also, as you can already tell, no one talks like this anymore. I mean these are good words to know especially when we get into history

books, but it wouldn't be a good idea to say things like... I don't know.."

"I daresay Mr. Wheeler, I should think you of all people... would know that I am not a .. a simpleton!" El said with mock enthusiasm that Mike was speechless. He wasn't sure what just happened. Did El just make a joke? El smiled at him and then looked down at her hands. "I watch a lot of T.V. The ladies.. that are very... bossy and well I imagine Anne like them." Mike chuckled, still trying to process El joking around. It was amazing what a year of T.V could teach a person. She looked slightly embarrassed.

"Actually, I think Anne is a lot like Max. Con.. confident, redheaded, pretty.."

"Wait, I've been meaning to ask, but why don't you like Max? I remember the day you made her off fall of her board. Did she do something to you? " El looked away guiltily.

"No, she didn't do anything. It was me. I.. It had been so long since I had seen you.. I was so happy to hear your voice and see you smiling.. but then I saw Max and you were smiling at her .." El took a deep breath, with all these lessons she knew the exact words to describe what she felt that day. El was ashamed of what she did. "I was .. jealous.. envious. I wasn't allowed to be next to you, because it would put you in danger.. But she could be next to you.. She wasn't dangerous... She was normal.." El's eyes got blurry and she whispered "safe" but Mike still heard it. ".. And I wasn't.. I was upset ... angry and I made her fall... I know it was wrong. What I did was .. bad.." El wiped her eyes and was looked at Mike, whose expression was blank, but then his eyes were.. smiling? He was trying not to laugh. Which made El confused and more than bit peeved. She was being very serious.

"Mike.. why are you laughing?" El asked slowly becoming annoyed with his poorly disguised grin.

"I'm not laughing.." Mike made a noise that sounded suspiciously like a laugh that he tried to turn into a cough. El's eyes got bigger and she wasn't sure how to react. On one hand she wanted to smack that smile off his face, but on the other she loved seeing Mike happy, even

if was at her expense. So she reached over and pulled the hood of his jacket over this stupid goofy gorgeous grin. Looking at him was taking away her anger and she wanted to hold on to it a little longer.

"Mike. Why are you are laughing at me?" El said clearly irritated.

"No!" Mike pushed up his hood and scooted closer to El who crossed her arms and gave.. a pout? El was pouting? *..She really must be watching a lot of T.V.*

"You are lying.. And friends don't lie.." El raised an eyebrow and Mike realized he liked seeing her like this. Her eyes were fiery, her cheeks flushed, and her lips were pursed. How could Mike not be enjoying himself.

'Alright, I'm sorry for lying, but you being jealous of Max is more than hilarious." Mike took El's hand and gave it a squeeze sensing El's anger dissipating into confusion. "Just trust me on this." Mike said and pulled El into a hug which she resisted at first, but eventually softened. Who could stay mad at him?

"Honestly, I've been kind of an ass to Max joining our party because I missed you so much. So you being jealous of her is kind of .. funny."

"You were an ass to her?" El thought about that for a second as Mike released her from their hug, "Am I a bad person, if that makes me glad?" El asked and Mike started again with the laughing. It had been a serious question and she poked Mike in the chest which made him fall over laughing even harder. El couldn't help by smile at him, his body lying on the blanket holding his middle and trying to catch his breath. All with the biggest brightest smile on his face. It's not her fault that she started to chuckle, just a little.

"Hey! What's with all the noise? Aren't you love birds supposed to be studying? If you're done, then get in here. We gotta write these summaries and then it's game on. Mike you have a campaign ready for us right?" Mike and El looked at Dustin who had opened the door. "I mean you have El's character ready to go right? Lucas and I helped Max with hers so we are set." Dustin gave the thumbs up while Mike and El started to head inside.

"You don't have to play D&D if you don't want to, we could watch a movie or .."

"What? Who wouldn't want to play D&D? Stop your crazy talk, Mike. Listen El, this shit is going to blow your mind.." Dustin put his arm around a puzzled looking El. Mike just shook his head and followed them in.

Authors Note: Okay, so I said six chapters, but I've lied to you.. I know, 'friends don't lie'.. my bad.. And I'm going to stop myself from lying further so let's just say.. I have no idea how far I'm going to take this. There's just too many things that I want to write about. I wanted El and Mike to have their moment together, I want El's exploration of powers to not go without consequence, and I wanted to fiddle with teen angst (worry not.. I hate when writers fiddle too much with the angst). I was hoping to fit the whole of day 20 in this chapter, but surprise surprise .. I got carried away. One last thing: Thank you Thank you Thank you to my reviewers. I can't tell you how much I love to see them. That Aussie Fangirl - I will be checking out your stories, Starla Marie Locke - Thank you!, Skandal - may you enjoy the increase of emotions, cuz your about to get shook soon, Rhaella Tully - ever the clever reader, and RWHG8 - thanks for sticking with me. I hope you all enjoyed this chapter.

6. Chapter 6

Chapter: 6

Author's Note: Sorry! I try to update at least within the week, but I got distracted and then I had a really fun idea to add to this story, but I was having a hard time working it into the story deciding if it was worth it to change previous chapters and then I got the stomach flu ... okay let me stop my excuses. I've been trying to cram so much into the story to prep it for the ideas I've had, but I didn't want it to sound contrived. So I spent a lot of extra time trying to make it flow. Also I had to do a lot of D&D research so what I'm trying to say is I'm sorry this was late and I will try to post the next chapters on time. Now enough of me.. enjoy!

Once everyone was back inside the house, D&D broke out on the kitchen table. El got permission to have the rest of her homework finished by Monday. Joyce wasn't really worried about it. El, more than anyone else, wanted to catch up to her friends and she was a competitive little devil. It also helped that Joyce understood just how much reading was involved when it came to playing D&D. Thankfully, Mike was there to guide her through the character he made for her.

"Here are your character sheets.. we can change things around if you want, but I just made sure you were the same level as everyone else and.."

"Where is your character?" El said watching Mike put up a cardboard barrier in front of him.

"Actually, I'm the DM, the Dungeon Master. I'm the one who created the campaign so I'm kind of everyone else in the story, but you guys."

"Wait.. what?" Max said still unsure about this whole thing. It was one thing to be a part of the party, but playing D&D? .. She knew this was the line into dork-dom that once she crossed, she could never uncross.

"I thought you were the Paladin?" El asked confused.

"I am when someone else wants to DM. But it's a little hard to DM while being in the party.."

"Not to mention it's cheating!" Dustin slammed his little miniature on the table. "See, the DM knows everything that's coming which is an unfair advantage and even if he says he's being unbiased, you never truly know..." Mike smirked evilly at Dustin. It seemed like this had happened before and was a sore spot for Dustin, even so El decided she liked Mike's evil smirk. A lot. Maybe a little too much. El shook her head and tried to focus.

"Basically, we are all telling a story together, but the story has rules. As DM, I try to make sure the rules are in place so it's fair while still being lots of fun. We will get more into the story soon, but I want you to be sure you're okay with the character I made you, we can change.."

"Mike, we can explain it to her on the way. I mean, Max is going to be just as lost so we will take it slow. Not to mention, we've never had a 'Zoomer' before.." Lucas said looking skeptical.

"I thought you said I was a .. what now.. a Druid?"

"They just introduced Druids as a character class this year and.."

"Yeah yeah. Whatever.. Let's just start, I wanna see what all the fuss is about."

"Alright fine, but El.. I left your character unnamed in case you wanted to pick one. That way we can start with introductions. Here, I'll set the scene: an orange sunrise crests over the mountains of a small town and a small cozy tavern slowly awakens. Three heroes meet with two unlikely travelers. The first traveler is.." Mike paused. "This is where you introduce yourself..." Max started and pulled out the papers she had been given and realized she hadn't read anything about her character.

"Oh. Hello I.. I'm Zoey the Zoomer? .. really guys?" Lucas and Dustin snickered. "I'm a Druid cleric who has powers specializing in wind magic and I make a zooming sound everywhere I go.. Wow.. I hate you guys so much right now." Max scowled at the poorly contained

laughter coming from all the boys. El wasn't exactly sure what was going on, but was more worried about her own introduction. She wasn't sure how they would react to her telling them about her real name and about Mama. Hopper had mentioned it, but what would they think when she explained?

"Nice to meet you Zoe the Zoomer. I'm .." Lucas was immediately interrupted.

"Ya, no. I'm changing that name. I'm *the* Zoomer, thank you. Zoomer for short." Max folded her arms and gave Lucas and Dustin a glare daring them to object.

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance Zoomer, and who is your lovely friend?" Dustin asked looking over to El.

"Um... I'm Jane." El said tentatively trying to gauge what they thought. Mike smiled at her and nodded for her to go on. "When I was in Mama's belly, she named me Jane. So I want to be Jane. Jane.. the Mage? I don't know want to make a noise.." as the chuckles continued.

"Wait. You were taken away from your Mom when you were born?" Mike asked. Everyone was listening in and El nodded and took a deep breath. She found that she was actually excited to tell them about her Mama. It was an interesting bond you formed when your Mama couldn't talk, but you knew she loved you with all her heart.

"I left the safehouse to find Mama the day before I closed the gate. Mama can't talk. Her head is .. broken..." El's face grew dark, "they hurt her... but she's special like me and when I found her in the void she showed me her dream circle." El smiled at the very confused faces that surrounded her.

"Your mother had powers like you?" asked Dustin, eyes wide.

"Sort of.." El paused, how was she going to explain her Mama's powers..

"She can move things with her mind, but it's harder for her. But in the void, she's stronger than I am." El smiled proudly, "much stronger.

I don't really know how to explain it." She felt a hand on her shoulder and she looked up at Will.

"It's okay. You don't have to tell us if you feel uncomfortable." El gave Will a small smile and then looked down at the arm still touching her. It was his right arm. El looked back to Will who understood where her mind was going and yanked his hand back. Mike, who always seemed hyper aware of anything to do with El, caught the change in the atmosphere.

"Will, you okay?" Will looked at Mike, then back to El, and then around the room. He wasn't able to disguise his anxiety and so everyone's attention veered to him.

"I.. I'm fine. I just.." Will looked at El who was calm when she put her hand on Will's arm and gave him a reassuring squeeze. He seemed to draw strength from El. She was so strong and she seemed to look at him as if he was the strong one who just hadn't realized it yet. Will slowly relaxed then took a long deep breath, his eyes glued to Eleven's as he started his explanation.

"I've been going in and out of the upside down again." There was a collective stillness as Will continued, wanting to get this over with. "It's not as bad as before, not as frightening. I think I'm kind of getting use to it." Will shrugged and finally looked at the rest of the party. "Weird part is, the shadow monster didn't see me. It was almost like I was able to hide or maybe I was just lucky, but my luck ran out a couple nights ago and for some reason I couldn't get out. I mean, I'd gotten better at forcing myself back here, but then all of a sudden I was stuck. The shadow monster .. it was coming towards me so..when pinching didn't work, I bit myself to wake up." Will hesitantly pulled his shirt sleeve up and showed them the mark. Someone gasp and Lucas, who was sitting next to Will, leaned in for a closer look.

"It looks infected. We should put some medicine on it." Lucas said as he looked at the dark lines around the bite. It was red and angry looking. Lucas grabbed his bag and took out a very small first-aid kit. Max looked at two small bandaids he pulled out, impressed. Lucas always seemed to be prepared for the worst. Max admired that.

"How long have you been able to go in and out of the upside down?" asked Mike gently.

"I think it might have been a week after El closed the gate. It's always accidental, but it started to feel different. Before, I hadn't realize it at first, but it felt like I was being pulled into it.. Now, I can just slip in.. sometimes. It's usually when I'm thinking about it or if I'm getting frustrated. I know that sounds stupid, but.."

"Not stupid." El said and then gave Will a smile. Mike looked between the two, he was happy that the party got along well with one another and it was easy to see how El and Will would end up being good friends, Mike just wasn't sure how he felt about them being closer than he originally thought. *God, Wheeler... Stop being an idiot! We're all friends. Lighten the hell up..*

"How did El know?" Mike asked, trying really hard to keep his voice normal, but of course El looked over, curiously. Will looked over at El eyebrows raised, wanting to know the answer to that question.

"I saw you bite yourself." El lowered her voice, "and I saw the monster." El gave Will a knowing look that Will couldn't decipher what she was trying to say.. and then it clicked..

"You saw the monster? Wait. Did he .. did he see.." Will was trying really hard to not panic, but if the monster was able to see where El was..

"No." El said quickly. "He can't see me. Don't worry, Will. He can't get me." El's eyes went hard and her whole body language changed. She looked so intimidating and dangerous. *She's so strong, but she can't know how strong the monster is, could she?* Will drew in a breath trying to relax.

"Okay you guys lost me. El saw Will bite himself and saw the shadow monster but he can't see El. So.. I mean finding out that Will still has true sight is a surprise, but you guys look like you're about to shit yourselves so.. What am I missing?" Dustin said and Lucas and Max nodded in agreement.

"The shadow monster is after El." Mike said just coming to the

realization and looking just as surprised as the rest of the party. El looked over at Mike and saw his face changing from shock to worry.

"How do we know that? We don't know that. I mean, did he see you closed the gate?" Dustin asked.

"Yes" El looked at Dustin then at Will. "He tried to stop me from closing the gate, but he couldn't" El looked over at Mike, "he couldn't get me." Will looked at El and shook his head.

"I don't know, El. He's just so .. big" Will laughed without any humor. "I'm not talking about his size. He's just.. everywhere.. He knows so.. so much and .. I'm not explaining this right. What I'm trying to say is, I think you just surprised him when you closed the gate. The next time he'll be prepared and I don't know if you can win." Will looked down, embarrassed in his lack of faith in her abilities. El looked away from Will. She didn't say anything to comfort him, because deep inside she knew he might be right. All she could do was keep practicing, keep digging deep into her powers, keep making herself stronger.

Mike was still looking at her with a worried expression. "Hold on. You've known the shadow monster is after you.. When did you figure that out?"

"When I closed the gate." El said giving Mike a private smile. Mike's eyes widened in understanding. *So that's why she's been pushing herself..*

"Okay that's enough with those, 'I'm speaking to you with my eyes'.. okay.. There are some in our party that need verbal answers to the questions being asked." Dustin leaned over to Lucas and loud whispered, "Lucas, your welcome." Max laughed and the tension started to ease and they were able to bring the party back to the game and onto safer topics. El tried to keep up with all the new words she'd never heard of and was about to give up and ask about them when Max made a frustrated sound.

"Okay stop. I need you guys to start speaking English. What the hell is a D20? And what does initiative mean? Yes, Dustin I know the meaning of the actual word, but you're all using them.. weird! And

don't look at me like I'm the crazy one, you all are the weird ones. Okay, let's start again.." El couldn't stop the smile that made its way to her lips. Max saw this and pounced. "I swear, El, these boys are just trying to throw us off, because they know once we figure out this little game of theirs, we are going to cream them at it." Max gave El a cocky smile and El tried to stifle a laugh. El had only started to gain confidence in herself recently and watching Max, the teenage embodiment of confidence, was truly a sight to see. Still, the words she used could be just as confusing as the boys.

"Cream them? We put cream on them?" El wasn't sure why Max wanted this. *Huh, well I guess that would be fun..* The party chuckled and Max explained.

"Beat them by like, a lot. We win!" Max raised her arm, made a fist, pulled her arm down, and tilted her chin up in triumph. El liked this playful interaction with the redhead. So she looked at her hand, raised it and made a little fist and slowly brought it down. El squinted in concentration and nodded, "Win". It was so cute that Max's smile widened and she laughed. "Awesome!"

"Win...Awesome." El said and nodded then looked at Mike, who raised his eyebrows and nodded along with El a huge grin on his face. "Cream you." El said with a mischievous grin. Mike had to put his hand over his mouth to physically prevent a laugh from coming out.

"Technically there isn't really a winner, okay.. The game doesn't work like that. So put your girl power away." Dustin said in his sassy voice. They started to bicker, it seemed like they were enjoying arguing as much as everyone else enjoyed watching.

"Don't worry, you'll get the hang of it, plus" Mike leaned closer, "as the DM, I can make sure you don't get into too much trouble.. "

"Cheater! Bald-face cheater! The DM is suppose to be unbiased and you..."

"I'm just joking. Jeez, calm down.." Mike said and winked at El which started Dustin on his speech about cheating, again.

As the game progressed, El found she didn't mind it so much. Her favorite part was watching Mike become the different side characters they encountered. He was in his element and she forgot just how well these guys worked together. Their dynamics mixing so well that the story turned into an highly entertaining one. It also helped that she had Max to ask all the questions, which made allowed El to relax and enjoy this time with her friends.

"That's right! Bring out the dragon, for me to slay!" Dustin said as he did his happy dance.

"We are nowhere near strong enough for a dragon rightnow, man. We have two newbies and an injured cleric. Healing is what we.."

"You hear a roar echo through the cave and.." Mike says again with that evil smirk rolling dice they can't see.

"Oh shit!" Dustin quickly sat back down. He hadn't actually been expecting a dragon so soon, but before they could do anything else the front door opened and Nancy and Jonathan walked in with pizza.

"Oh no. Are these guys forcing you girls to play this horrible game?" Nancy said with a smirk. "Bleh. Let me know, if you need any rescuing. We brought over a movie to watch so.."

"We aren't forcing anyone to play this awesome, amazing, and underappreciated game.. wait is that pepperoni and mushrooms?" Dustin said beelining it to the pizza. Joyce who had been reading a book on the sofa got up and grabbed a package from the closet. It was 5:00 pm and parents would be showing up in an hour so Joyce handed out the confetti poppers to the kids while Dustin was loading up his plate, trying to arrange the uncooperative triangles to fit on a circle. Nancy went to the fridge and pulled out the cake. Once everything was in place Joyce rounded the table.

"Hey Dustin.. Um could you count to 3 real quick." Joyce was not good at these things. Dustin gave her a confused face and she just made the just-do-it gesture with her hand.

"One, two, thr..."

"Happy birthday!" Turns out, no one was good at these things and the confetti poppers all went off at different times. Still, Dustin turned around as the shiny pieces floated down. Mike had mentioned they were going to 'surprise' Dustin during dinner, but El had no idea what that had meant. Now, she couldn't stop smiling as the tiny pieces paper got all over the place. Then people started to bring out gifts. *Oh no..* El's face fell as she was filled with guilt.

"I really didn't plan this well.. The confetti poppers were new to the store and it's a bit of a mess, but.." She smiled as Dustin's face. "Happy Birthday! Now everyone sit down and eat. Thank god the pizza is covered."

It was about 5:30 when the phone rang.

"Oh hey Hop, she's fine we are just finishing up our pizza party for Dustin..." Joyce's face turned serious and everyone watched as she listened intently to whatever Hopper was saying.

"I'll be right there. No it's fine, Nancy and Jonathan are here to watch them. No, I'm coming. See you in 15." Joyce hung up and smiled at the silently curious faces.

"It's nothing, I'm just going to help Hopper with something very quickly. If I don't come back before your parents come to pick you up, then have a good night you guys. Nancy and Jonathan Hopper and I will be at the station so call if something happens. Okay?" With that Joyce grabbed her coat and was out the door.

"Alright.. I hope we get to find out what that was all about. I'll put in the movie in if you guys wanna watch.." Nancy said as she reached for a slice of cake.

"Woah, we got only 30 mins before people have to leave so let's finish.." Mike started to say.

"I wanna go first." El said abruptly. When Joyce left, El had thought of something. But she wasn't sure if it would be okay. It was just Jonathan and Nancy. Would they get mad? Would they tell? El looked over at Dustin and smiled. He'd said that she shouldn't feel guilty for not getting him a present since she was on 'house arrest'

and his present was just having her here to celebrate. So, naturally, El decided it would be worth the possibility of getting into trouble. Everyone's attention was on her as she stood up and walked into the kitchen and grabbed a wooden mixing spoon and made her way back to the table. *I think this will do..*

"Alright. Let's move the pizza and get this party started." Dustin broke the silence. El was acting very strange, which was no surprise there and if there was really a dragon in the cave, Dustin had to know before the night was over.

"What's that for?" El ignored the questions and just smiled and looked at Mike who looked confused. He could tell whatever it was El was clearly very excited about it so he would wait and see.

"I want to go first." She said again.

"Um, remember El we have to roll for initiative to see.." Dustin said. El picked up the d20.

"Okay. I roll a 20" She held her hand out and focused on the dice, then rolled it until it stopped. El coughed and moved it to 20. No one moved. Needless to say they were all speechless. Everyone knew she wasn't allowed to use her powers. Mike was the first to move and that was to once again, hide his smile.

"Um .. that's cheating?" Lucas asked and looked around the table. Still not sure what was going on.

"Is it cheating, Dungeon Master?" El gave Mike her most innocent smile and it only made Mike's smile get bigger. *She was a cheeky little thing. Still, what was she planning?*

"Looked good to me."

"Psh! Of course you would let that go.. You know we're going to have to find another DM if this keeps up.."

"My turn." El interrupted Dustin and stood up. She looked around the room trying to figure out just how she was going to pull this off. She was starting to have second thoughts. Would Dustin even like it?

"Um.. I want to cast a spell.." All eyes were on her which wasn't helping her nerves.

"I cast a birthday present spell on Sir Dustin." Dustin's eyes widen and El smiled. "I'm sorry I didn't bring you a gift. I hope this is okay.." El kept her eyes on Dustin as the confetti on the floor started to rise all around them and stopped in various places in the air.

"Holy shit!" The floating confetti made it look like the group was surrounded by little colorful stars. The effect was breathtaking. Literally, no one was breathing, except for El.

"Sir Dustin, please rise and put on your armor .. and weapon-ree." El gave Dustin the wooden spoon and laughed. Dustin's face was in a stuck in an euphoric expression that it was comical looking. He slowly took the sword which El then moved some of the confetti over to look like a sword. After a couple seconds of trying to shape a sword she looked at Will. "Help?" Will was smiling. They were all smiling. Even Jonathan and Nancy looked like they had fallen into a story book. Looking at the various levels of astonishment on their faces, made El relax.

"How do I.. I mean.. What.." Will reverently approached the 'sword.'

"You can move them with your hands. Like sculpt.. sculpting?"

"Oh, got it!" Will got up and moved the confetti into a better place so they had a recognizable sword. "Wow.. this is .. really cool El." Will said while poking a piece of bright blue confetti it moved and then stopped. Will laughed.

"Mike" Mike was just as frozen in awe as everyone else with El's display and shook himself a little when his name was called. "Can you tell the story of Sir Dustin the Bard slaying the Dragon?"

"Dragon?" Dustin's voice went super high from his excitement that everyone laughed. Which seemed to break the spell and people started to move again. Max stuck her arms out and tried to gather a bunch of the floating confetti into a ball. Lucas tried to blow on a couple near his head, but they didn't move until he touched it. Nancy threw her arms out and spun in a circle feeling some of the confetti

hit her face and laughed.

"Shh! We still need to put on your armor." El smiled at Will who nodded and together they shaped the floating confetti into recognizable armor.

"Now here is the tale of Sir Dusin and how he slayed the Mighty Dragon." When Mike said dragon El lifted her arm to make the rest of the confetti on the floor rise as well as some dice and miniatures and shaped them into a dragon, that looked more like a horse. Will quickly got to work making it look believable.

"The Mighty Dragon, seeing his foe, gave no worry for he had never been bested. But alas, Sir Dustin was no fool and had prepared with .. a shield?" Mike looked and El and she gave a laugh brought one of the pillows from the couch to make a shield. It smacked Dustin in the face who was still grinning like an idiot.

"Oh yeah!" Dustin crouched into a battle stance and El made sure to focus on making the confetti and pillo move with him.

"The Mighty Dragon gave a mighty roar and charged at Dustin who rolled out of it's way." Dustin rolled as the dragon 'charged.' El's nose scrunched and she quickly realized she was not as good at this as she thought. But everyone seemed to be enjoying it. More than enjoying it they were all laughing as Dustin's armor and shield reformed on him haphazardly.

"The Dragon realizing his foe was no ordinary foe and drew on his mightiest of weapons..."

"Jeez Mike, need another word for 'mighty'?" Lucas said and Max laughed.

"Shut up Lucas. Like I was saying he had resorted to using his powerful dragon flame." El gave Mike an exasperated look and he smiled sheepishly at her. "What? It makes for a better story and we can just imagine it you don't.." El turned to Will.

"Red paper?" Will ran to get some and the moment he came back El raised her other arm. She could feel the blood trickle from her nose

as the paper immediately shredded to the same size as the confetti and flew into the dragon. El looked at Mike to let him know to get on with the story, but everyone went still again. Seeing the once red paper just poof into dust..or rather confetti, it was enough to make them all stop and stare.

"Damn, that's so cool.. Oh ya.. the Mighty Dragon blew out his dragon flame which Sir Dustin blocked with his magical shield" El twisted her fingers to make the red paper fly out and hit the raised pillow, then she heard clapping. Nancy gave out a "Whoop, go Sir Dustin!" which, of course made Dustin blush.

"You know technically the shield would need to be 5 times stronger than a shield we could ever afford at the levels we are currently.."

"Shut up Dustin! You're actually slaying a dragon you lucky asshole" said Lucas a huge smile on his face.

"It is seriously the coolest thing ever!" Max chimed in shaking her head in disbelief.

"Ahem, telling a story over here, thanks. Sir Dustin, now injured from the blase staggered to his feet only to fall back down to one knee." Dustin groaned as he dropped to one knee. "The Mighty Dragon saw his chance to destroy his foe and proudly stood tall about to take a monstrous bite of our hero. All hope was lost.. but wait! Sir Dustin raised his sword at the last minute and delivered a fatal blow to the dragons exposed belly." Dustin dramatically raised his wooden confetti spoon sword and shoved it into the 'dragon' while attempting a heroic battle cry.

"The Dragon utters a final roar and crashes to the floor, leaving Sir Dustin victorious." El focused the dragon to fall over and made the confetti explode around the whole living room getting in everyone's hair. She took a deep breath and sat down on the chair and looked at a very happy Dustin.

"Holy shit El! That was the most amazing... I mean, I can't believe.. words cannot describe.. " Dustin started saying while kneeling down to El and looking at her like she was his hero.

"Can we do this again on my birthday?" Lucas asked and El couldn't help but smile while Max rushed over.

"Okay, so like I'm sure i'm still in shock, but that was the most incredible.."

There was a knock at the door and everyone looked at the door.

"Parents." El said. Everyone was quiet as El got up from her seat and gave a little wave as Mike took her hand and moved them to one of the rooms and shut the door. They both put their ears to the door to listen, they could hear Jonathan's voice and then a deeper voice El didn't recognize. Then they heard a voice that sounded like Max's. El and Mike's hands were still together. Neither wanting to let go of the other.

"I think it's the Mayfields. I know Max's parents were giving her a hard time about this get together. Apparently they don't trust Mrs. Byer's or Hopper very much." Mike said and then turned his head to listen with the other ear. He looked over at El and realized that their faces were very close. El looked at him and smiled while scooting closer. She heard Mike swallow loudly. He looked in her eyes and then her nose and finally her lips.

"Mike.." El whispered. "I.. I'm sorry I cheated." Mike's eyes came back to El's his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. She looked down embarrassed, "I moved the dice to 20."

"Oh. Well technically, the DM gets the final say on what is allowed so you didn't really cheat. I was the one who cheated for letting it go." Mike smiled at her. "I'm sure my judgment as DM will be called in for questioning with a lot of the things you will want to do in the game. I'll more than likely let you get away with anything." Mike chuckled and El smiled and let her eyes wander his face. She knew after tonight it would be another month or so before she would get to be next to him.

They could still hear the voices in the living room so they stayed right where they were. Ears, cheeks, hands, and chest pressed against the door with their noses almost touching. They were both content just looking their fill. El could feel her heartbeat in her chest and had

an idea.

Mike knew she had light brown eyes but when you looked closely you could see they had specks of amber in them. They seemed to glow as El got closer and Mike tilted his head to one side. His eyes started to close until her head dipped lower and he felt soft curls against his chin. She had pressed her head against his chest. It was not what Mike was expecting, but he was not going to complain. With his free hand he pushed away from the door and wrapped his arm around her. It was a little awkward since he wasn't that much taller than her. Mike moved them so they were sitting on the floor leaning against the door with El's head never leaving his chest. He enjoyed having her close so he squeezed her tighter and closed his eyes. He knew he should probably be listening for when the strangers leave, but he couldn't seem to make himself care at the moment. He felt so comfortable, so relaxed, so .. tired..

"Your heartbeat." El whispered, finally breaking the silence. She was smiling at the sounds coming from his chest. *Lub dub*. The rhythm made her body relax against his even further and then oddly, she felt her chest get warm, almost hot. She felt the heat travel from her center to her limbs. El wasn't sure what was happening, but she was starting to get dizzy. Her head started to spin and the sensation seemed familiar, but El could barely focus and the spinning was getting more intense. Then the heat in her body started to get painful. She gasped agony pulsing through her body.

"El, you okay?" Mike asked when he felt El's body stiffened against him. He leaned down to look at her face. El's body relaxed again and he was finally able to move her chin up to see if her face. The moment her eyes opened, the skin around her eyes darkened and her once light brown eyes were growing dark like a shadow was spreading from her irises. Dark veins were spreading from her eyes towards her hairline. Mike could feel the air around him grow heavy and his body seemed to float for a second until it was shoved back down and Mike couldn't move. El's body started to float over his, Her eyes never leaving Mike's, unblinking, unyielding, unfamiliar, and so dark. It scared the shit out of him. It almost looked like her eyes wanted to eat him. He wasn't sure this was his El anymore. He started to panic as she kept getting closer when suddenly she froze. Her head

jerked to the side, like she was listening intently to something. Her body started to descend toward his, but instead of laying on his body, she went through him. Suddenly, Mike felt a hot pressure settle in his chest, like someone pouring hot water on his chest to slowly move through his veins and he couldn't help but squirmed. Mike heard a pounding in his head and then he was falling. When he hit the ground and the pounding stopped.

"They fell asleep by the door? Seriously, c'mon love birds time to wake up!" Mike heard Dustin's voice and felt his shoulder being shaken. Mike opened his eyes and tried to sit up, but El was sleeping on his chest and he slowly sat up making sure not to wake her. *It was all a dream?* Mike wiped a drop of sweat traveling down his cheek.

"Wow, had a good dream, huh?" Dustin and Lucas snickered. Will looked concerned. Mike looked white and flushed at the same time. He was disoriented, still not sure what just happened. *When had I even fallen asleep?*

"Haha, very funny. El? Hey, you okay?" Mike shifted so he could look at her face, but then hesitated. Not sure what he would find, but as her face came into view it was normal.

"Damn, she's out. What were you guys doing in here?" Lucas smirked and elbowed Mike in the shoulder.

"We made sweet, sweet love." Mike deadtoned while trying to move El into a more comfortable position.

"WHAT!" Dustin and Lucas said at the same time. Both Will and Mike gave them exasperated looks.

"If you two are done being morons, could you help me get El to the bed. She's really out of it. I think 'Sir Dustin and the Mighty Dragon' might have drained her more than she let on." Eventually they got her to the bed and Mike looked very carefully at her eyes trying to find any trace of what he had dreamed. *Wait, what did I dream?* Mike was having a hard time remembering and it seemed like the harder he focused on it, the quicker it slipped away. *But it was important wasn't it?* Mike shook his head and saw El's eyes open. The moment their eyes connected, Mike felt the world settle and righten. Like he

had been walking on a wavering boat and suddenly stood on hard land.

When El opened her eyes, something was different. She couldn't say what, just that she was.. different.. changed somehow. It bothered her until she looked at Mike. His face was relaxed and almost content, but that was weird. *Wasn't it? Didn't something just happen?*

"Ahem, if you guys could pull yourselves away from each other for a second, Hop and Joyce called a while ago and told us that the Hawkins Lab is going to be shutting down because of what Nancy and Jonathan had recorded." Dustin informed them.

"No more bad men." Lucas said and smiled at El, who smiled back. El knew that wouldn't be the end of the bad men, but for now this was great news.

"Maybe I can go to school sooner?" El half said and half asked. Mike just kept smiling and looking at El and she once again found herself gravitating toward him. Losing track of what they had just been talking about.

"Okay, seriously guys! We are here too, you know. There are other people that exist in the world and in this room. Geez, c'mon Lucas, maybe we should just let them make that sweet sweet love Mike was talking about.."

"That sweet sweet WHAT!?" boomed a voice from the hallway and a very angry red faced Hopper stepped into the room.

Authors Note: Enter in my maniacal laughter.. I do so enjoy a little fatherly rage/over protectiveness. Once again, sorry this chapter took so long. Originally, I was going to do a movie night, but I had such a hard time picking a movie that it just didn't seem worth it. Next time, though. I promise :). As always, I want to thank all my reviewers. KanetheReaper: so glad you gave the story a chance; escafil123: El's powers are so fascinating to me and I just recently decided to do something crazy with it in the upcoming stories so I hope you stick around for it; PondLake: May this chapter also keep you smiling; SnowMione17 and Starla Marie Locke: I'm so happy you enjoyed the blanket scene from last chapter. It was honestly what I had wanted to

write from the beginning. Expect more blanket scenes soon (only I'm thinking some star gazing might be in order.. Oh no spoilers! Shhh!). And last but not least, That Aussie Fangirl: Thank you for your continued support. I hope you all enjoyed this chapter and write a review because I love love love them